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THE

BOUDOIR CABAL.

A Novel of Society.

BY

GRENVILLE MURRAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE MEMBER FOR PARIS," "YOUNG BROWN," ETC.

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by *Gerville Murray*



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BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES A PROMISING PEER.

Some three weeks before the opening of the Parliamentary Session, the *Morning Post* announced that Viscount Mayrose had returned to London from his travels, and, as good luck never comes single, Society became aware that his lordship had brought back a fine fund of handsomeness and an amusing valet who fancied himself a Count in difficulties. Such unmarried ladies as were too young to remember Lord Mayrose before his travels, looked up his case in the Peerage, and found what follows :—

"Mayrose, Frederick Lyon Springfield, 8rd Viscount, in the Peerage of the United Kingdom. Born 184—. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. His lordship is the only son of Charles, 2nd Viscount Mayrose, and of his wife Emily, sixth daughter of Sir Richard Leech, of Hampstead, Middlesex, formerly Commissioner at Baypore. Sir Lyon Springfield, 1st Baron Mayrose, was raised to the Peerage by Charles I., after the battle of Edgehill; and Hugh, 7th Baron, created Viscount in 1812 for his services in the Peninsular War. Residences :—Springfield Park, Hiveshire, 108 Berkeley Square; White's, Patron 1 living."

A man cannot well pass through Eton and Cambridge without leaving some traces behind him, and accordingly more than one of the unmarried ladies enquired of their brothers whether these latter had known Lord Mayrose, and if so what manner of man he was. Brothers being generally speaking stupid, the answers given were that Mayrose was a good fellow, who had been in the boats at Eton, and used to row "seven" in the 3rd Trinity crew; his weight must have been under 10st. 7lb., and he had graduated 15th Wrangler. Nothing could have been vainer than this information, and it was only after being diplomatically put straight that the brothers were brought to face the real question, which concerned Lord Mayrose's rent roll. As to this, however, the brothers could only furnish poor accounts. Mayrose was not rich: he might have £10,000 or £5,000. There had been a smash, or half a smash, at some time in his family, and a few of the brothers ventured to imagine that he had nothing at all. Needless to say that the sisters would have somewhat preferred hearing that Lord Mayrose's circumstances were more elastic, even though he had never rowed in a boat or wrangled—for we are a practical people, who set light store by futilities. Nevertheless, as all the brothers in London hurried off like a single man to drop their cards at 108 Berkeley Square, it was supposed that this young peer, who had weighed less than 10st. 7lb., possessed attractive qualities, and an amiable curiosity was excited about him.

He was in truth very attractive—perhaps the most attractive Englishman who had ever set out in a hat bought at Cairo, a coat built in Vienna, and boots ordered at Baltimore, to call upon a solicitor in New Square, Lincoln's Inn. There was a sunlight in his eyes and a cheery smile under his light waxed moustache which won the heart of Mr. Deedes' clerk as it had that of the cabman to whom Lord Mayrose tossed five shillings, and it presently warmed the soul of Mr. Deedes himself as he hastened forward with thin hands extended to greet home his client :—

"My dear lord, welcome again to England. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to see you back so safe and so well."

"I am glad, too, to be home, Mr. Deedes," laughed Lord Mayrose, affectionately shaking the lawyer's hand, and throwing a circular glance round him as if he knew the old room by heart. "It seems an age since I went away, yet looking at you I can think it was but yesterday."

"Oh, my lord, five years are a heavy sum out of a shrunken purse of years like mine;" and the lawyer wheeled his client an arm-chair near the glowing fire. "To you, however, who have abundance of years in store—a very rich abundance, I trust—the time has no doubt sped by like a holiday."

"Heigh! well, not so much like a holiday as that," answered the peer, sinking with comfortable enjoyment into the chair, and crossing his feet over the fender. "The more I travelled the better I learned that there is no place like England, Mr. Deedes. The Turks did not cure me of home-love, no more did the Yankees."

"Such is the impression which I myself have derived from foreign travel," meditatively rejoined Mr. Deedes, whose adventures as an explorer ranged from the Grand Hotel in Paris to the Hotel Bellevue at Brussels; and he proceeded to clean his gold-rimmed double eye-glass with the tail of his coat, the better to scrutinize the young peer whom he had known from his childhood and esteemed.

He was an ancient and venerable limb of the law was Mr. Deedes. His features had not changed since his client's eyes had first beheld them somewhere about the date when Lord Eldon was Chancellor. The black swallow-tail coat he wore was part of his belief in constitutional safe-guards, like wigs and costs; and the rest of his apparel was shepherd's-plaid trousers, a black cravat which went twice round his neck and would have obligingly gone a third round if desired, a tape watch-cord, and low shoes with strings to them. Time seemed to have grown afraid of him in his augustness. It had marked no rude crows-feet under his eyes, and only cast a little additional snow into his hair now and then as if from powder-puff and afar.

Lord Mayrose examined the lawyer at the same time as he was being himself peered at, and with a like benevolence. It refreshed him to see this legal bulwark of his property and family secrets in as good repair as a quick-set hedge, and as he talked of the men and things he had seen abroad he came back frequently to this point, that he had met with no one who compensated him for Mr. Deedes. The solicitor lent a flattered ear to all this, and scanned the peer's remarks with an occasional smile, as if the foreigners described were so many harmless lunatics whom the Court of Chancery indulgently suffered to be at large, and whose fitted mission here below was to afford diversion to British noblemen and their solicitors. Then, when Lord Mayrose paused after a while, stretching his Baltimore boots more enjoyably than ever towards the coals, he said:—

"And now, my lord, we may hope you have come back to settle down and take your proper place in society?"

"Yes, Mr. Deedes, if society cares to have me."

"Of that there can be no shadow of doubt. But you will find society much altered—its rapid transformations sometimes bewilder me."

"I knew so little of it before I went that I shall not be able to perceive the change," said Lord Mayrose. "I started, you remember, as soon as I had taken my degree—just a year after my poor father's death. But that brings me to business, Mr. Deedes. I must not encroach upon your time with so many other people waiting."

Mr. Deedes bowed with a deprecating smile, and touched a hand-bell. "Lord Mayrose's papers," he said to the clerk who answered the summons; and this clerk, who had yellow hair, weak knees, and an appearance of having washed his hands in the inkstand, presently returned with a pair of crimson tin boxes, both mottled with red spots as if they had caught measles from each other.

"I can never see those boxes without remembering the day when I came up from Cambridge to borrow a thousand pounds of you," remarked Lord Mayrose, showing his gay white teeth. "Do you recollect that, Mr. Deedes? You refused me the money, though it was not for myself."

"Generosity was ever your besetting sin, my lord," paternally rejoined the

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lawyer, as if he had quite forgiven his client for having gone away empty-handed. "You must see now that I acted wisely in protecting you from an extravagant young man who wished to abuse your nature. I trust you have ceased to bestow your confidence and money on all who ask for them."

"A man can only give what he has, Mr. Deedes, and it seems I have next to nothing. How much is it a year—six thousand, three, one?"

It turned out to be five thousand, but the circumlocutions by which Lord Mayrose was made acquainted with the exact position of his affairs need not here be recorded. Rent receipts were shown him, renewed leases, parchment trusts, accounts of investments in Consols; but the burden of these tape-girt documents was that Lord Mayrose must not rely on more than £1,250 every quarter-day. He received this statement philosophically as he twirled his Cairo hat. His father had been almost entirely ruined during the railway mania of King Hudson's time, and it had cost some trouble and not a little shrewdness to save as much as £5,000 a year out of the wreck. For this result, such as it was, the family were mainly indebted to Mr. Deedes, who felt towards the Mayroses whom he had saved that kindly regard which we generally confer upon those whom we have extracted from a ditch. Lord Mayrose, who was an orphan with no brothers and sisters, was not extravagant, and the five thousand annual pounds had not diminished in his keeping: but they had not increased. He spent his income as regularly as it was paid him, and deemed himself quits towards mankind so long as he incurred no debts. He might, to be sure, have added to his substance by letting his town house and country seat whilst he was abroad; but this he had scrupled to do, and Mr. Deedes, though he had expressed surprise at the resolution, had inwardly respected it, knowing that it was prompted by filial motives almost pious. Lord Mayrose's fathers having lived and died for centuries under the same roofs, the young peer shrank from hiring the homes of his race to strangers. For all which, relying on the business talents of Mr. Deedes with the naive faith of those who understand nothing at all about business, he had hoped somehow that his £5,000 might have fructified to £6,000 or £7,000 in his absence. But Mr. Deedes explained to him that any enterprises towards this end would have been singularly incautious. The firm of Deedes, Tarry & Ponder had made it a principle to mistrust investments bearing more than 3½ per cent. interest, and they had found this principle work safely. Lord Mayrose had only £5,000 per annum, but this income, drawn from corn-land, sheep, felled trees, and the Consolidated Fund, was stable as the globe itself—nay, much stabler.

The conference lasted an hour, and then Lord Mayrose thanked Mr. Deedes.

"Five thousand is not much, but I can make it do. Besides, I may possibly work and earn more. There are posts under Government still to be had, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly there are, my lord," replied Mr. Deedes, surveying his client with revived interest. "If you devoted yourself to politics, it would be a career most worthy of you. Your distinguished abilities and the experience you have doubtless gathered abroad——"

"Well, well, we must talk about it some other day," interrupted Lord Mayrose, reddening and smiling again with one of those pleasant smiles which looked like summer light to Mr. Deedes. "My only plans of ambition for the present are to get into English clothes again, and to see whether I have not forgotten the tongue of London drawing-rooms." Saying which he rose with a glance at his Austrian coat.

"You are sure to be a welcome guest everywhere this season, my lord," responded the solicitor, rising too.

"Heaven hear you, Mr. Deedes. Will you come and dine with me—when shall we say? Will Sunday do? We can make an evening of it discussing what I am fit for—if the topic doesn't bore you."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure, and if my advice can be of any assistance to your lordship——"

"I should not think of taking any step without it," answered Lord Mayrose, heartily; and with another warm shake of the lawyer's hand he wished him good-bye. Going out he dumbfounded the little clerk with yellow hair by dropping half-

a-sovereign into his fuky fingers, then loitered a minute on the landing to light a Cuban cigar, which perfumed the staircase for an hour afterwards.

CHAPTER II.

SIR HAM PENNYWODDLE.

Lord Mayrose had not been gone five minutes before the yellow clerk, somewhat dishevelled by the gratuity he had received, admitted into Mr. Deedes' presence another important client who had been cooling his florid complexion in the square below, and who was none other than Sir Ham Pennywoddle, the well-known warden of the Sausage-Makers' Company. If London squares were managed on foreign notions of the useful, New Square would have been laid out as a flower garden open to the public, and it would have afforded Sir Ham an eligible bench or two to rest his limbs on until Mr. Deedes were disengaged. But like many another square-garden in this enlightened capital, New Square, which none of the residents ever use, is prudently barred round with spikes five foot high to keep sentimental intruders aloof; so that Sir Ham, who preferred fresh air to the muskiness of a solicitor's waiting room, had been fain to pace up and down the pavement, deriving such recreation as he might from the sight of precipitous clerks hugging bags, and stuff-gownsmen rushing nowhere in a violent hurry.

He was a great man in his way, and was not ignorant of the fact. Sprung from nothing, he had raised the British sausage trade to a height never contemplated by the inventor of that wholesome delicacy, and it was his boast that he had brought the choicest saveloy within reach of the working-man. For these and other patriotic works, amongst which must be reckoned his indefatigable promotion of the Oyster-shell Joint Stock Utilization Company, from which he had cleared half a million pounds or so, Sir Ham had been appointed to the office of Sheriff, then to that of Alderman and Magistrate, it being a notable axiom in these isles that a man who has weighed sausages successfully is eminently fitted to mete out justice. Sir Ham stood five feet two, and sported a bordering of orange whiskers, which gave his face the aspect of a well-conditioned sun-flower. His eyes, which were grey, stood out of his head like marbles astonished at the height to which Sir Ham had risen over all those oyster shells and sausages; and his hands were large across the knuckles, as if ready to grasp any new profits which might turn up to-day, to-morrow, or next week. Thus well-favoured, and replete with the consciousness of his own respectability, Sir Ham should have been happy; but he was not so, and we shall soon find out why.

"Good morning, Sir Ham," said Mr. Deedes, advancing with a different kind of civility to that with which he had greeted Lord Mayrose—a quiet civility, yet very deferential.

"Good morning, Mr. Deedes." And Sir Ham sat down all of a heap in the chair which the peer had vacated, and then groaned out his words slowly, as if each of them were a shilling, only to be parted with after reflection. "I have come about that Parliament business, Mr. Deedes. When I bought my place in Hiveshire I thought it would be easy to get into the House of Commons for Hiveborough, and so did my wife. Well, it ain't easy."

"I am sorry for that."

"No, it ain't easy. Yet I ought to be in the House of Commons. I am just the man for it, so my friends say."

"They are quite right, Sir Ham."

"Aye," mused the Warden of the Sausage-Makers' Company, bringing down the plumpest of his forefingers on his right knee, as if he were going to fix a point which everybody had overlooked. "Aye! but the electors of Hiveborough don't think so. They say that if I don't get the support of Lord Mayrose, who owns most of the land about, it would be wasting my money to try. Now, as I said this morning at breakfast, I don't waste my money."

"Lord Mayrose has just left me this minute, said Mr. Deedes."

Sir Ham Pennywoddle lifted his round head with a jerk, and snorted gravely—

"Was it that young man with the cigar and the curly-brim hat."

"I presume so; he has not been gone ten minutes."

"Well, I shouldn't have thought it, Mr. Deedes," answered Sir Ham, as if he were a little scandalized. "Now, what kind of a man is he?—do you mind telling me that?"

"You are sure to find him a most agreeable neighbour," replied the lawyer, after a moment's hesitation.

"Aye," stolidly echoed Sir Ham, bringing down his other forefinger as if there was a new point wanted fixing; "but would he support me—that's the question?"

"May I ask what are your politics, Sir Ham?"

"What are his'n?" retorted Sir Ham, who occasionally reverted to the solecism of his earlier sausage days when excited.

"I—I— Upon my word!" and it suddenly occurred to Mr. Deedes that he had no knowledge of Lord Mayrose's politics. If politics ran in the blood as they now and then do in careful households, then the Viscount ought to have been a Tory, seeing that his fathers and grandfathers had been so before him. But these are days of unaccountable innovations, foreign contagions, and the like. Lord Mayrose having been abroad might have learned to run his opinions in new-fangled grooves, and Mr. Deedes felt bound to unfold this before Sir Ham Pennywoddle, who hearkened with attention as if he were on the Bench dealing with a case full of intricacy.

"Then it's no use putting any pollartics of my own forward till I just know how the wind lies," said Sir Ham, with judicious emphasis. "I'm not particular myself as to which side of the House I sit on, Mr. Deedes; for to tell the results of my experience both sides of the House are exactly alike, and that's what my wife says. Only I've got a daughter to marry, and a son growing up, and for their sakes—it ain't for mine—I want to get into Parliament."

"Supposing you call on Lord Mayrose?" suggested Mr. Deedes.

"Supposing you introduce me to him?" returned Sir Ham whose wits were singularly keen where the main chance was concerned.

"I must ask his lordship's permission to do that, but I have no doubt that he will be delighted to make your acquaintance," said Mr. Deedes; and in so speaking he spoke his mind, for he had never met a man yet who would have been sorry to know Sir Ham.

"It's agreed on then!" ejaculated Sir Ham, with a solemn kind of alacrity, as if he were clenching a bargain contracted before two witnesses. "You introduce me to his ludship, and then we'll talk about the Parliament business. When can I have your answer, Mr. Deedes?"

"I shall see Lord Mayrose on Sunday, and I will send you a note on Monday," rejoined the lawyer.

"That's it," nodded Sir Ham, getting up. "And now I'll leave you, for further talk just at this present would be a waste of time. Business is business. Good day, Mr. Deedes."

The interview with Sir Ham had not taken long, but it left Mr. Deedes wrapped in a meditation which lasted some minutes. Sir Ham Pennywoddle wanted to get into Parliament, and Lord Mayrose could no doubt help him, for the popularity of his name had outlasted the wealth of his house—a phenomenon not often witnessed in these our times; but then Hiveborough was a backward place. Mr. Deedes found himself musing over Sir Ham's full-blown money-bags, his oyster shares, steam sausage rollers, and what not. All these things were to him an abomination, but then Sir Ham had alluded to his possession of a daughter.

"I wonder what sort of a young person Miss Pennywoddle is?" reflected Mr. Deedes half-aloud as the yellow clerk showed in the next client.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MR. DEEDES IS SLIGHTLY SHOCKED.

Life is a fast game of cards, and it happened singularly and tragically enough that on the very day following the above events the papers reported the sudden and lamentable death of Mr. Micah Pennywoddle, only son of Sir Ham. This hopeful young sausage-maker had left his life at the bottom of the mill-stream whilst hunting with the South Hiveshire Hounds, on a roan seventeen hands high, which he bestrode like a pair of tongs. The accident threw a gloom over the Hunt, which of course, adjourned its meets till after the funeral. It bowed down poor Sir Ham, who for a week could think neither of oyster-shells nor of Parliament; and it made of Miss Mary Pennywoddle one of the richest heiresses in this treble kingdom.

This last aspect of the case could not fail to strike Mr. Deedes, coming hot as it did upon his meditations concerning Lord Mayrose and Sir Ham's daughter. The position of the two families towards each other was this:—After the catastrophe which had ruined the late Viscount, most of the Mayrose estates had been sold to a railway company, which had purposed constructing a new line in the neighbourhood, and building an iron foundry for the manufacture of its own engines, rails, and carriages exactly on the spot where the Mayrose pheasants used to roost. If this notable project had been realized, the lands which remained in Lord Mayrose's possession would have quintupled in value, for round the foundry would have sprung up a town, and around the town suburbs of semi-detached villas must have come into request. But after forming the subject of a few quarto volumes of printed reports, a private Act of Parliament, an arbitration, and a lawsuit, the scheme had been abandoned as impracticable; and during Lord Mayrose's absence the lands of the railway company, now bankrupt, were purchased by Sir Ham Pennywoddle. It was not only natural, it was inevitable, that a lawyer of Mr. Deedes' benevolent instincts should, under such circumstances, dream of restoring his noble client, by a marriage, to the ownership of part at least of his lost estates; and though in a general way Mr. Deedes believed only in himself and in the High Court of Chancery, the unhappy death of Mr. Micah Pennywoddle developed his faith in providential interference. Miss Mary might now bring her husband the whole of the former Mayrose property, and this not counting five-sixths of the oyster-shells in the British Isles.

But Mr. Deedes' hope of seeing Lord Mayrose master of all these oyster-shells and acres was not destined to outlast his Sunday dinner with the peer. Lord Mayrose was the last man to consider money in appraising the wifely qualities of a woman or of any one else, and so Mr. Deedes, much to his chagrin, discovered. The bereavement of Sir Ham was the first topic which the two gentlemen discussed on sitting down to table in the massive and rather gloomy dining-room at Berkeley Square.

"I do not know Sir Ham," said Lord Mayrose, with sympathy, "but I left a card on him yesterday as an act of neighbourly condolence, and I will go down to Hiveshire to-morrow to attend the funeral. It is a duty."

"Sir Ham will be much touched," answered Mr. Deedes, well pleased. "He is a worthy man, unusually rich, as your lordship knows, and that reminds me that before this sad calamity he begged I would ask your permission to introduce him. I believe he desires your support at the next election in Hiveborough."

"I thought he had a wardenship to attend to—the Beef Boilers' Company—"

"Sausage makers," said Mr. Deedes.

"Sausage-makers, yes; doesn't it absorb all his time?"

"He is very industrious, I know few men more so," rejoined the lawyer. "He has never missed a sitting of the Common Council, so they tell me, and he has all the concerns of the Oyster-shell Company on his hands besides."

"I should have thought this was the more reason for not saddling him with new duties," observed Lord Mayrose. "But I see you don't take Madeira, Mr. Deedes; perhaps you are like me, and stick to French wines right through? Which do you prefer, Burgundy or claret?"

"Mr. Deedes was helped to some "Hermitage" of Count de la Sizeranne's own brand, and its generous spirit seemed to warm him, for he returned somewhat eloquently to Sir Ham's very reasonable wish to be a legislator.

"Well, to tell the truth, I believe I have no influence in Hiveborough," replied Lord Mayrose, 'apsing a little grave; "but if I had"—and here he waited a moment till the servants were out of the room—"if I had, you don't take a personal interest in Sir Ham, do you?"

"He is my client, nothing more," protested Mr. Deedes.

"Then I may speak frankly?" smiled the peer, inquiringly. "Well, I confess Sir Ham doesn't quite come up to my estimate of what a member of Parliament should be. All the merit in him seems to be drawn from those oysters."

"A self-made man, who has built up his own fortunes," remarked Mr. Deedes, trying to smile too.

"No doubt, and that's a great thing, but isn't Parliament rather over-stocked with this sort of men nowadays?"

Mr. Deedes, as he disposed of turbot, explained that in a country which aspired to walk at the head of civilization the self-made man, just in his works and well feathered, was fated to take a chief place; else would Progress be a vain word, and the fruit of one's labours a delusion. He expatiated on this axiom, and as he did so it appeared to him that Lord Mayrose looked very handsome, listening, in his new English clothes, and with the bloom which the welcome of a hundred friends had added to his genial features. Only the young peer's enthusiasm on behalf of Sir Ham Pennywoddle was like damp fire-wood, it required much kindling.

"I think we are agreed about the self-made man's deserts," answered Lord Mayrose, presently. "We only differ as to the particular recompense which suits him. If a self-made philosopher, author, inventor, lawyer—any one to be proud of, in short—came and stood for Hiveborough, he should have my support and welcome. Laws should be made with brains; and a man whose brains are better than his fellows' has a natural right to legislate for them—so at least it seems to me."

"There can be no doubt of it," assented Mr. Deedes, piously.

"I am not talking didactically, am I? But what I mean is that the mere moneyed man's rewards need not be the same as the thinker's. Now, Sir Ham has reaped all sorts of rewards. He is a millionaire, knighted, head of his corporation, alderman of his city ward—a very king on his own ground!"

"I suppose he would love to secure the crowning honour dear to most of us Englishmen," submitted Mr. Deedes, with mild tenacity.

"And his ambition would be a just one if Parliament were only an honour," proceeded Lord Mayrose, who spoke with modest grace, now that he felt he was arguing a point to which the lawyer appeared to cling; "but then there are duties, are there not?—a great country to govern; and, judging by recent English politics, I fancy men like Sir Ham Pennywoddle have had too much to do already with our rule and governance. It hurts me, I must say, to hear foreigners talk about England as they are doing—little Frenchmen, you know, whom we have thrashed all through the pages of history; and then those Yankees!"

"I can guarantee that Sir Ham is not wanting in patriotism, my lord, and I make bold to say that he has no prejudiced leanings towards either party—Whig or Tory," observed Mr. Deedes, gathering new argument from his wine, as if he perceived that close reasoning was necessary.

In truth the discussion was growing delicate. To the exclusion of other topics it monopolized the time till the cloth was removed, and continued when the desert was on the table and the coffee had been brought in. From what the lawyer could make out, Lord Mayrose had indeed—as he feared—brought back with him some of those new-fangled notions which may be useful to foreigners, but which to the Englishman are unpalatable, not to say dangerous. He did not appear to follow the march of progress as it was followed at Lincoln's Inn. In alluding to certain eminent persons who had promised the country a great deal before they had attained to power and performed very little afterwards, he used the hard word of "clap-trap mongers," and then he sketched his ideas of a strong Government—namely, a Government that should make England impregnable, London habitable, keep

Catholics—Irish and other—in their place, and teach foreign peoples to be civil. All these paradoxes were painful to Mr. Deedes, for it has been already said that he liked his young client, and he sagaciously foresaw what social troubles would be in store for him if he broached his queer views too candidly. As to Sir Ham Pennywoddle, too, Lord Mayrose concluded by saying—

"I ought by rights not to meddle in an election, and if the Hiveborough people are good-natured enough to consult me I must probably tell them to vote as they please. I would support Sir Ham if I thought he could introduce any new idea into Parliament, but otherwise I see no reason for unseating the present member. Do you, Mr. Deedes? By-the-bye, he is one of your cloth, I hear?"

"A pushing young barrister of the Temple—one Mr. Dexter," answered Mr. Deedes in disparagement; and, as it was evident that his diplomacy had failed so far, he thought it better to drop all further references to Sir Ham just for the present. Before doing so, however, he could not refrain from observing rather significantly, between two sips at his coffee, that Miss Pennywoddle would be a fine match for any man who won her affections; but to this Lord Mayrose's cheery answer was as dispiriting as those which he had returned to political questions. He said, raising a glass of curacao to his gay lips, that he wished Miss Mary's husband joy, and especially a taste for oyster-shells—which rejoinder, thought Mr. Deedes, was neither witty nor prudent; for we know that prudence was Mr. Deedes' forte.

But after this other topics were brought up, and it was not till near eleven that Lord Mayrose accompanied his guest to the door and saw him snugly packed in his brougham. They had spent a pleasant evening in despite of Sir Ham; and after shelving the latter, had entered for a while on Lord Mayrose's own prospects. But what resolutions the peer had come to on this head will be best explained by the following letter which a footman took to the post early on the morning after the dinner. It was addressed to the "Countess of Rosemary, Elmwood Park, North Hiveshire":—

103 BERKELEY SQUARE.

MY DEAR LADY ROSEMARY,—If you have not forgotten, more than I have, the many kindnesses you formerly showed me when I was a boy at school and college, you will not be surprised to see me at Elmwood before the end of this week. I have just returned from abroad, having picked up a great deal of what is called experience, and learned to fancy myself much wiser than I really am. At all events I find I am out of tune with English thought, and it will be a gracious thing of you to give me the true key-note. May I count on this good service? I am going down to Hiveshire this afternoon to attend poor Mr. Pennywoddle's funeral to-morrow, and shall then remain a day inspecting Springfield, which I have not seen for five years. On Thursday (D. V.) I will travel to Elmwood, and, if this sudden visit be no intrusion, ask you to harbour me for a week. I may confide to you that I am possessed with a curious idea that my country wants me to serve her in a post of dignity and emolument. I must have caught the hallucination in America, where every man who is not fit for stone-breaking turns politician, and exerts his dullness at the public expense.

My love to Azalea and Violet—though I should with more propriety say, my respects to Lady Azalea and Lady Violet Carol, for my little playfellows must have bloomed into full-grown flowers by this time; also my highest regards to the Earl, and believe me,

Dear Lady Rosemary,

Most faithfully yours,

MAYROSE.

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CHAPTER IV.

FUNERAL AND VIGNETTES.

The funeral of Mr. Micah Pennywoddle was an imposing ceremony. A hundred gentlemen of the South Hiveshire Hunt mustered in the dining-room at Penny Hall, and sipped sherry and mulled claret while the undertaker robed them in long cloaks, and distributed to each man black gloves a size too large for him. The five-score horses of the mourners champed on the gravel-sweep outside, while the grooms were blowing on their fingers to keep off the January cold, and the hearse with six horses and twelve crests of plumes towered gloomily amid the fog. Two mutes stood at the door, both blue from the weather, and the drivers of the ten mourning coaches, looking top-heavy with their hat-bands, tried to beat the numbness from their extremities by drumming their fingers on the hammer-cloths, and tapping their feet against the foot-boards. Inside the hall, darkly draped footmen with black epaulets and aiglets flitted about, bearing trays of decanters; and down the staircase stole housemaids with black ribands in their caps, carrying nose-gays of violets and mortuary wreaths into the library filled with heavily bound books all unread. Here three undertaker's men in shirt-sleeves and fresh from drinking ale were soldering down a leaden coffin to be enclosed in an oaken one, the which in its turn was to be encased in one of maple covered with red velvet. On this last a silver-gilt plate, engraved with a Latin inscription by the Vicar of Penny, recorded the "Eternal Memory of Micah Pennywoddle, the pious son of Ham Pennywoddle, Knight."

Into this scene of sumptuous desolation Lord Mayrose, who had ridden over from his seat at Springfield, entered a few minutes before the hour for starting, adorned with black gloves of his own. He was quickly recognized by Sir Ham, who shuffled forward and thanked him very profusely:—

"All this kindness breaks my heart, my lord, and it would have broken poor Micah's if he could have seen it—a good son, my lord, never caused me an hour's trouble."

"I was much grieved," answered Lord Mayrose. And he mumbled the remainder of the sentence usual on these occasions.

"Thank'ee, my lord, thank'ee. I used to tell the boy:—'Never go out hunting, Mike, till you can rely on your seat;' but at business or in his saddle, my lord, he was always sure of himself, and this is the end of it."

Poor Sir Ham, whose eyes were blurred with tears, was divided between the true grief caused by the death of his son and the great honour done him by the county magnates who were going to follow the latter's coffin on their covert hacks. All the morning he had been wiping his eyes in the presence of peers and big commoners—Lord Beaujolais, the Master of the Hounds; Lord Adolphus Drone and Sir Ralph Cleargate, the South Hiveshire members; various other noble Drones of the Ducal house of Bumblebeigh, and dozens of minor county people in sable array—so that it would have needed little illusion to convince Sir Ham that his son, so universally lamented, must have perished gloriously on a battle-field. Death in its sudden, violent forms was, in truth, a strange and new thing to these Pennywoddles. So far as they were aware all their fathers had died from over-eating or over-drinking themselves—died in their own beds, fat and surfeited, or asthmatic folk, as the case might be. Never had one of them shed his blood for his country, sacrificed his life to science, to adventure, or to saving other men's lives; and this death of Micah Pennywoddle in the hunting-field therefore came upon them like a ghastly innovation—something like a brutal practical joke of Nature's. For all which, whilst mourning for his son, Sir Ham could not lose sight of the soothing fact that he himself was still alive, and so said to Lord Mayrose between two sobs—

"That lawyer, Deedes, must have told your lordship that I was for going into Parliament if you'd help me. It was all for Mike's sake, poor lad! and I'd have ended by making a Lord of him; but I'll come forrard all the same. Yes, I think

it'll do me good, and my friends say I'm made for Parliament, my lord. Then I've my daughter's 'appiness to look after."

Lord Mayrose was not prepared to be asked for his support under these funeral circumstances; but he was spared the necessity of committing himself, as his good heart might have led him to do, with all the black draperies, cloaks, and gloves acting on his feelings—he was spared by the master of the ceremonies, who glided across the room, gold watch in hand, and whispered to Sir Ham. This was the signal for starting, and all the gentlemen flocked out slowly into the cold, and mounted their horses, while the coffin was borne across the hall by twelve groaning men, of whom nothing was visible but the legs, by reason of the flowing pall. Lord Beaujolais, bareheaded, placed himself at the head of the cavalcade, behind the tenth mourning coach, the other horsemen formed behind him in a long troop four abreast; and when the hearse door had been shut with a snap, when the mourning coaches had been filled with collateral Pennywoddles, chaplains, doctors, members of the Sausage-Maker's Company, and other important mourners from the city, then the procession broke into movement, wound across Penny Park, through a lane of awe-struck bumpkins, and so to Penny Church, where the bell-ringers were tolling one stroke a minute. Penny was a new parish, formed by Sir Ham out of his estates. The church was a new one, spick span white, and surrounded with a nest of new model cottages, roofed with pink tiles. The churchyard was new, too, no one had yet been buried in it—and so was the vicar.

Lord Mayrose turned his horse's head homewards after the ceremony accompanied part of the way by a rush of riders, who congratulated him boisterously on his return to England, and hoped to see him regularly in future at covertsides, county dinners, Quarter Sessions, and everywhere else. So they said, and their warm greetings pleased him; but he was not sorry when they left him to pursue his ride alone over the broad lands which had once been his ancestor's, and were now Sir Ham's. Somehow he was in low spirits after this morning's events. He had done his duty as a gentleman and as a neighbour by attending the funeral of a man whom he had never seen, and for whom he cared nothing; but he had not reckoned on the impression that would be aroused in him by the contrast of Sir Ham's rich domains and his own diminished property. These impressions were disagreeably poignant. To wealth in itself Lord Mayrose was indifferent, and he had even thought, when abroad, that he could spin himself a very snug bachelor life out of his £5,000 a year. But the homage paid in England to great landowners, and the ambiguous position in which a man is placed who has a splendid name to keep up, without possessing adequate means for so doing, struck him with force now that for the first time he reasoned practically on the subject. If the Railway Company had kept his lands, the bitterness would have been less. Trains—express, luggage, and parliamentary—would have flashed, rumbled, and come into collision with each other over the quondam Mayrose glebes, and there would have been nothing in this to excite his jealousy. But that new Penny Park and parish—that new Penny Hall, which had been built of Portland stone and granite, as if its new-come owners meant to take immutable root there, and so jostle his name out of men's memories, all this was painful. It put him out of conceit with Springfield, its long corridors of empty, old furnished chambers, and its modest girdle of land scarce a square mile round; and it made him feel like a stranger in the county, where past Mayroses had all been masters. However, as the young Viscount winced at thoughts which had any savour of meanness or envy in them, he shook his head, set his horse at a hedge or two to see if he had left any of his nerve in foreign lands, and at a rapid canter reached Hiveborough. This venerable market town had once been enclosed bodily in the Mayrose estates, but it now marked the bounds between the Springfield and Penny properties.

"I wonder how that man could think I had retained any influence in this place," mused Lord Mayrose as he ambled down the main street and remarked that every tradesman having a soul to save had disfigured his shop front by putting up shutters in honour of Mr. Micah Pennywoddle. This reflection though was unjust, for the Hiveborough people loved him well. The town had not been sold to Sir Ham; it was still in the hands of the official assignees of the bankrupt railway,

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and, electorally speaking, the inhabitants might consider themselves independent. But they had been accustomed so long to think and act at the beck of the Springfield family that they were not inclined to throw off this easy habit, which had grown into a sweet second nature. Hiveborough owed everything to the Springfields—its existence to begin with, for a Lord Mayrose had built the place; then its church and town-hall, its Gothic market-cross where Dissenters and Papists took turns at having their ears cropped in happy days gone by; and last, its famous museum of stuffed birds—fit symbol of the flight of progress as understood by a well-feathered and cautious people. It is a fact that Hiveborough was not high-minded, and had no proud looks. It preferred adopting the opinions which bigger cities had discarded sooner than cut out new and stiff ones for itself. It clung mildly to Church and State, and had not yet embraced those consoling doctrines of Mr. Darwin's as to the tadpoles and chimpanzees our forefathers.

Lord Mayrose found himself fingering his hat-brim at every step through this placid borough, for the tradesmen left their counters to bow to him from their door steps; others came bravely on to the pavement and smiled to him as if he were a son of theirs. Some of the tenderer sex sketched respectful curtsies behind window-panes, and blushed to see the Viscount's blue eyes rest on them with pleasant recognition. At last opposite a photographer's shop, inscribed in carmine letters "TOUZLE," the peer's progress was definitely stopped by a youth in a velvet jacket elaborately stained with acids, who rushed out, stammering—

"My respects to your lordship—Jack Touzle, my lord, son of your lordship's old gardener."

"So it is! Why Jack you've outgrown me!" exclaimed Lord Mayrose, reining in and holding out his hand cheerfully. "You would make two of me, I declare. Have you anyone to hold my horse?"

"Yes—here Dick! Step in, my Lord, in memory of old birds'-nesting days. Let me show you Mrs. Touzle, and I'd be glad to take your photograph."

"You shall indeed; not to-day, I suppose, for we have one of your Hiveshire fogs on. But how came you to give up gardening?"

Pretty Mrs. Touzle, who was sorting albums, and wore smart ribbons in her hair, was introduced, reddening, and received a compliment which could be given without flattery; while Mr. Jack Touzle, having committed the peer's horse to his shop-boy with the injunction not to play games with it—rather a needless injunction seeing that the horse was sixteen hands high and the gameful boy not four feet—proceeded to a course of that gabbling for which photographers and barbers seem to have derived from Providence a special patent. How Mr. Touzle had been moved to forsake the cultivation of crocuses for that of negatives need not concern us here; but the details had an interest for Lord Mayrose, and this interest was fitly capped when Mr. Touzle produced likenesses of the divers eminent persons he had photographed in order to prove that the world wagged well with him.

"The Duke of Bumblebeigh, my Lord. His grace is growing old, but had me over to Hivesworth on purpose to do the whole family, servants and all. This is Lord Hornette, and this Lord Adolphus, whom your lordship knows well."

"Yes, Dolly Drone," mused Lord Mayrose; "I saw him this morning, and this Lord Beaujalois; he and his top-boots seem to have been born together."

"This is Mr. Quintus Dexter, my lord, the sitting member for Hiveborough. How he comes to represent us no one knows. He got in by a fluke, for nobody opposed him and nobody wanted him."

"An energetic face," said Lord Mayrose, taking up the photograph; but before he could fully study the features of the fluking M.P., his eyes were attracted by a vignette which had certainly fascinated many another customer before him.

It was that of a girl in the full bloom and radiance of beauty. Nothing could be brighter or chaster than the expression of the face; nothing sweeter or more intelligent than the eyes which seemed to sparkle with candour and gaiety. It was a face to dream over and luckless the man who should dream over it too long without having any hope of going beyond dreams! Lord Mayrose felt that the features were familiar to him, and he endeavoured to recollect where he had met

them before, but he could only call up vague images. "Who is this?" he inquired of Mr. Touzle.

"Why, my lord, don't you know?" exclaimed the photographer. "Why it's Lord Rosemary's daughter, Lady Azalea Carol, and here's her sister, Lady Violet. I suppose they've changed since you last saw them."

CHAPTER V.

LADY ROSEMARY.

In stating to Mr. Deedes verbally, and to Lady Rosemary by letter, that he wished to take a part in the government of his country, Mayrose was more in earnest than his mere tone might have suggested. He had gone abroad very deliberately to pick up the sum of worldly knowledge which can only be acquired by foreign travel; and, now that he was home, he had no idea of letting his attainments lie by like unproductive capital. He spoke French, German, and Italian fluently; knew all about the politics and customs' duties, the manufactures and judicial institutions of the countries he visited; and had furthermore brought back from the New World a quiet contempt for democracy, such as lent a pleasant zest to his opinions. It is a great point to feel a resolute contempt for something. It may not pay so well as pococuranteism, but then pococuranteism, if it occasionally makes successful men, seldom makes great or happy ones. Mayrose was convinced in his simple way that British Constitutionalism, as it had worked from the first Reform Bill to the death of Palmerston, was the soundest thing ever discovered; and to see a parcel of talkative men pull down this fabric simply because it suited the immediate purpose of their party interest, seemed to him as wanton a piece of work as the conduct of those savages, instanced by Montesquieu, who cut down a tree by the roots to pick off the fruit. Mayrose longed to interpose whatever strength and energy he might possess in the way of this selfish destruction; and added to this feeling of patriotism was of course the natural ambition of a man young and eager to find occupation and earn distinction for himself.

The Countess of Rosemary was just the person to help him to satisfy this longing. The wife of an amiable man of large property, who had sat in several Cabinets, and might at any moment become a Minister again, she wielded a social influence much in excess of her husband's personal weight. Not to know Lady Rosemary was grief to the pushing Londoner; to be counted among her intimates was a certain passport to whatever favour, social or political, the aspirant might desire. Lady Rosemary knew how to collect remarkable men round her, and, what is more, to retain their allegiance. She was popular with all sorts of persons who, generally speaking, love only themselves; and it was not the least proof of her talent, that, disdaining insincerity, she had told truths—now and then very plain truths—to sensitive people without ever offending them. The secret of this lay in her thorough kindness of heart, in her supreme tact and utter want of malice. Over-ardent politicians who had made a false start, authors whom vanity or a passing fit of spleen was driving to write on a wrong tack, excitable men who had suffered from a grievance and were in a mood to run their heads against those stone walls with which grievances have been fenced about ever since the world began, and coquettes who were hovering round pitfalls—all these people had been adroitly saved by her and led back into straight paths. Their self-esteem might chafe at first—as self-esteem ever does when rescued from the follies it contemplates—but reflection ended by healing the soreness, and the people saved paid to Lady Rosemary the debt of gratitude that was her due. If Lord Rosemary had been of the stuff from which Prime Ministers are moulded, his wife would have made him a Prime Minister, but he belonged to the breezy care-nothing school above cited, and could bring to bear upon politics no other aptitude than the universally shallow education of a man of the world and an imperturbable serenity. It was known that such posts as he had held in different administrations, and held creditably for that matter, had been bestowed upon him for his wife's merits, not

for his own. The minister had keptership sent to the

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for his own ; and an anecdote related that on a certain occasion when a new Premier had resolved to entrust to Lord Rosemary no less an office than the Lord Keepership of the Waste Papers, he wrote down absently on his list that was to be sent to the papers :—" Lord Keeper—Lady Rosemary."

Such was the lady to whom Mayrose had written. She was a distant connection of his and, as he thankfully acknowledged, had shown him much kindness during his boyhood. His being an orphan had given him a claim on her ; but the chief claim was that Lady Rosemary, to her sorrow, had no son of her own. She had pitied and petted little Mayrose at first because he was motherless, then, growing to love his sunny nature, had cherished him maternally for his own sake. He had frequently spent his holidays at Elmwood, being called " Freddy " by the family, and treating Lady Rosemary's two daughters—Azalea, or Zellie, and Violet—as if they were his sisters. By-and-by the hard reading of college life had rendered his visits to Elmwood somewhat rarer ; after which he had started on his travels, and while abroad had corresponded but seldom with his benefactress, feeling some modesty about intruding the dry record of his wanderings upon a " grande dame " so much absorbed with graver concerns. Since his return, however, he had been blaming himself for this remissness, fearing it might be misconstrued ; and it was with some relief that he found, on arriving home after that episode at Mr. Touzle's the photographer's, an affectionate letter from Lady Rosemary chiding him gently for his long silence, and inviting him to come and stay at Elmwood till the opening of the session. She promised he would meet the Leader of the party to which Lord Rosemary belonged, for this personage was expected on a three days' visit, and she begged he would start as soon as possible.

He did start on the following afternoon. There was nothing to detain him at Springfield, for his steward, acting under the orders of Mr. Deedes, had kept the property in such fine order that walking about it offered no more excitement than surveying the squares of a chess board. Then Springfield Hall was a doleful residence for a bachelor. One of his ancestors had entertained the mutton-eating Monarch there along with his whole suite, and Mayrose felt that he and his three domestics cut the same figure in the big place as four peas in a caldron. A waggonette and pair was hired from the Springfield Arms at Hiveborough to carry the peer over the five-and-twenty miles of turnpike road which separated Springfield from Elmwood ; and Mayrose took the reins joyfully in hand, whilst his luggage located itself behind, under the custody of his polyglot valet Bino.

This Bino, who styled himself on paper Albino de Santo Paolo, was a character. By some inductive reasoning of his own he had come to fancy himself a count ; and having once upon a time been indirectly concerned in a State conspiracy (he had acted as a courier to a Carbonaro Marquis travelling between Venice and Rome,) he was persuaded that the entire police of Europe were on the look out for him. But he took his precautions by subjecting his head and face-hair to a variety of misleading processes, such as wearing now a mustache and hair clipped into bristles, now a full beard and curls cascading over his shoulders. At odd times he would dye his poll altogether, either flaxen or a bright red, and to this constant prudence he attributed his immunity from arrest and ignominious death. He could neither read nor write, but had not his equal for making coffee or preparing a breakfast in three courses out of nothing. He spoke no language, but could bandy the slang of every city from Alexandria to St. Giles's, and his imperious jargon had been known to cew hotel managers, railway guards, and steamboat stewards. Lord Mayrose had picked him up at Malta, and master and man had fared together ever since on terms of mutual confidence. Bino consulted the peer in his love difficulties, which were numerous, and about the management of an imaginary estate which he professed to own near Smyrna. Lord Mayrose was better brushed, catered for and cared for by Bino than he could have been by any dozen other servants, and would have been sorry to part with him. Now, stepping into the waggonette, Bino was a different man from what he had been in the morning, for he had ridden himself of some luxuriant whiskers which had graced him when he landed in England, and his left eye was dimmed by an eye-glass, which screwed a whole side of his brown face into wrinkles like a baked apple's.

"We are going to Elmwood, Bino," said Mayrose, touching his horses into a sharp trot as they cleared the park gates.

"Yes, milord, sir. I know all about it, sir," answered Bino, profoundly; for it was a habit with him to seem acquainted with everything, and to accept events with defiant resignation as if they had all been planned for his special discomfiture. "Yes, sir; plenty of lords there, but they no catch me; I too sharp for 'em. Yes, sir."

"I don't think they will hurt you, Bino; but try and behave yourself with the servant girls at Elmwood. We're in England, remember." This he said alluding to Bino's gallant propensities, for Bino was young and had been apt to behave too tenderly with the weak sex in Continental houses and hotels.

"Yes, sir," responded Bino, wisely ignoring this hint; "the Pope he want to see me very particular, and if he catch me he shoot my head off. I know him, milord. Yes, sir."

"We are coming to some frozen ruts," observed Mayrose; "shut your mouth a minute or you'll bite your tongue."

"Yes, sir; you take care of that side 'oss, I not like the look of him. England a queer country—'osses run as if their tails was on fire. Not much to say about the cooking either. No sir."

"What about the cooking?"

"That cook in Berkeley Square, he want to empty the pepper-pot into the *salmi*. Yes, sir. Said I to him, 'I say you Mister *Pichute Bete*, you get a fee from the doctor for poisoning us all.' That's what I say to him, sir — *Maladetto!*"

The expletive was evoked by one of the predicted ruts, which caused the wagonette to jump, and made Bino's teeth close with a snap on his glib tongue. The anguish kept him silent a few minutes, forcing him to hold the injured member between his fore-finger and thumb; but he was soon in a condition to give speech again, and if there be any truth in the saying, "*Comes jucundus in via pro equo est*," then Mr. Bino was certainly as useful to his master as a stud horse harnessed in front of the other two. Perhaps to Bino's taste the trap sped along too fast, for Mayrose drove rather like a Frenchman, taking all he could get out of the horses, so that their knees seemed as if they would click against the bits. Hedgerows and cottages, steeples and mile-posts flitted by; field after field dropped behind, and every minute opened up a new panorama of fair English scenery bathed in the saffron light of a winter sun. Two hours and ten minutes after starting, the wagonette passed the lodge gates of Elmwood, grated on the gravel of a mile-long avenue fringed with the stately trees whence the estate derived its name, and swept up to the door of the hall.

Mayrose had timed himself to arrive at the orthodox hour for country visits—that is, just sixty minutes before dinner. But the pace had been so good that he found himself with an hour to spend before the first dinner bell. The butler, an old acquaintance, smiled on him and wished him welcome, a brace of footmen assisted Bino and the luggage to alight, and Mayrose learned that Lady Rosemary was walking in the grounds. "I think her ladyship has gone to the dairy," said the butler; "shall I show your lordship the way?" But Mayrose knew the way by himself, and preferred to go alone. He strode through the hall with its antlered head of deer, its trophies of arms and full length portraits, and entered one of the morning rooms where he used to prepare his fishing-tackle in days gone by, with Zellie and Violet tying the flies for him.

Everything was not as he had left it, for Elmwood was not a place where furniture was made to outlast generation after generation. Even the pictures on the walls, the china on the mantleselves, the statuettes in the corners were changed, as be seemed a house which extended to Art a perpetual and ever-generous patronage. Mayrose passed through the open window on to a marble terrace, where half-a-dozen red and blue macaws began marking time on their perches at his approach, and cocked their heads to inspect him. He repaid their scrutiny with interest, and was casting a glance around him to reconnoitre the garden, the lawns, and the park beyond, when a sound of horses' hoofs fell on his ear, and cantering down a bridle-path that skirted the garden, he saw Azalea Carol, escorted by a sallow young

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rider who sat upright as a bar of iron. He would not have recognized her had it not been for that photograph at Mr. Touzle's; but now he walked quickly to the end of the terrace, and ran down the steps to meet her.

She was even prettier than her photograph. The ride had sent a mantling colour to her face, and in the well-fitting habit that set off her shapely form, in her coquettish riding hat, and with the scarlet pink stuck in her bosom, she looked the perfection of adorable girlhood. She too recognized her old playmate—though her memory had been refreshed by no photograph—and begging her companion to assist her in dismounting, she ran forward towards Mayrose with both hands extended, and put up her smiling face to be kissed.

"Oh, Freddy, how glad mamma will be to see you! But how cruel of you not to write to us for these long years!"

"I ought to have written, Zellie," confessed he, kissing her tenderly in very brotherly wise.

"So long without a line!" added she, looking up at him with simple reproach; then turning round towards her companion, "You know Lord Hornette, I believe?"

"Yes; Mayrose and I are old Eton friends," answered this heir of the Bumblebeighs, who had looked a little blue during the kissing. "How are you, old fellow?—delighted to see you again!"

"And he has become so handsome," exclaimed Zellie, linking her arm in Mayrose's, and scanning him again without a blush. "Come and look for mamma. She will be more pleased than you can think, and so will Violet—but here is mamma!"

Lady Rosemary and her young daughter were coming over the garden lawn, and Mayrose, with heart still beating, advanced hat in hand to receive a welcome not less warm than Zellie's. Once again he kissed and was kissed, and Lady Rosemary, taking his hands fondly in hers, said—

"We have been speaking of you as a truant these five years, Freddy, but we cannot see you without forgiving you."

"I begin to feel what it is to come home," answered Mayrose, with some emotion.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH LORD MAYROSE FINDS HIS KEY-NOTE.

The dinner at Elmwood, on this night of Mayrose's arrival, was very convivial. Lord Rosemary, who was always glad, was particularly so at shaking hands again with his young relative, and it detracted nothing from the pleasantness of the occasion that his lordship seemed to forget whether Mayrose had been absent five years or one. His mind was a smooth tablet, from which he sponged off people who were out of his sight, though he willingly wrote them down again when they came back. Handsome, well-dressed, with an unruffled look as if he were quite content to see the world wag as it did, he was the model of a host, and when his country wanted him the perfection of a trustful statesman. If half England had disappeared under water in a night, he would have made the best of the half that remained, for he knew that we live in changeable times, and must not worry ourselves about the turn of matters. Mayrose gave his arm to the Countess, and the other guests were the Earl of Hornette and his brother Adolphus—or Dolly—Drone, who were both staying in the house; and the Rev. Nonus Nines, who had known Mayrose at Cambridge. These, with Zellie and Violet, made eight round the table.

"So you have seen the world, Fred?" said Lord Rosemary, after Mr. Nines had muttered grace. "You will be able to talk with Mr. Paramount, who comes to-morrow. He delights in foreigners."

"You have met Mr. Paramount here before, have you not, Freddy?" asked the Countess, Mr. Paramount being the party leader.

"Twice, I think. He talked to me about foxes."

"He doesn't know a fox from a cat," laughed Lord Hornette.

"He'd make you a speech about them, though," put in Dolly Drone, with a simple faith in his leader.

"And what about the Spaniards?" enquired Lord Rosemary. "This morning's telegrams say they are up in arms again."

"Wretched hotels in Spain," remarked Lord Hornette.

"Is it true you were arrested in Seville, Freddy?" asked Zellie Carol, who was placed between the heir of Hivesworth and the clergyman.

"I am not sure whether it was me or my luggage they arrested; at all events the luggage suffered most," said Mayrose.

"Hotels test the standard of a people's political development," observed Mr. Nines. "When you order hot water at ten, and they bring it you at eleven, the people are only fit for despotism."

"We could get no hot water at all," was Dolly Drone's rejoinder.

"It caused us much anxiety when we heard you had gone to Peru during the earthquakes," interposed the Countess, with sympathy.

"And you helped to dig the people out, didn't you?" asked Lord Hornette. "It was in the papers. They gave you a gold watch."

"And we said it was so like you risking your life to save others," exclaimed Violet Carol warmly. "You will show us the gold watch, won't you?"

Violet was the replica picture of her sister, but a year younger. Her neighbor was Lord Dolly Drone, but she addressed many of her remarks to Mr. Nines, who sat opposite, and had come to Elmwood about a living which Lord Rosemary had offered him, and which Mr. Nines had journeyed from London to decline with thanks. Mr. Nines had gone out as a high wrangler at Cambridge, and had been wrangling ever since. He was a leading contributor to a well known review, and was a man whom society courted, because it is well to be on terms with reviews; also, Mr. Nines being a fellow of his college, a possessor of private means, and a member of a good club, was independent of patronage, and could wait without trouble till the time came for his running the usual curriculum of honours as a University preacher, a regius professor, a canon, and possibly a bishop. Pending this consummation, Mr. Nines hunted out the books of foreign savants, and refuted them; he made the minds of Church dignitaries bitter by telling them not to excite themselves when militant zeal or the sense of over-importance led them to use their croziers as pen-holders; and to the public he taught in politics, literature, and religion that there is as much to be said on one side of every question as on the other. Reading Mr. Nines' articles gave one a blessed feeling of security in one's own wit, or the want of it. To tally with Mr. Nines one had only to lay down that every controversialist was intemperate, every historian ill-informed, and every theorist whatsoever injudicious.

This divine, the best specimen extant of University metal, was well esteemed by Lord Hornette and his brother, who were both lawgivers, for Lord Hornette bloomed over a family borough remote from Hiveshire. They were worthy descendants of that great House of Drone which has helped to govern this realm ever since it was governable. No Drone ever did anything out of the common way, for there was no cogent reason why he should; but the roll of honest, square-headed and averagely-capable Drones who have commanded our land and sea forces, negotiated for us abroad, voted Acts for us at home, confirmed us, judged us, and taxed us, is a long one and pleasant to read. The heir to this fine heritage of square-headedness was small and lemon-coloured, but pleased with himself, which proved a certain gratitude towards Providence. He was not meek or shy, but there are virtues which can be of no more use to a future duke than skates to an Ashanti, and these two may be counted among them. It was said, too, that Lord Hornette's temper was not of the best, but his digestion was good; he could ride straight at a five-barred gate, kill steadily with both barrels, and keep as much good humour as was necessary for those who neither begged of nor bothered him. His brother was conspicuously unlike him; for whilst Lord Hornette looked like a portable edition of ducal principles, Lord Dolly Drone was a folio volume of more homely maxims. He was six foot high, proportionately broad, fat and healthy; and a joke was current that when the two brothers met, the younger noted complacently how much

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the elder had diminished since their last meeting, and wondered whether he would go on diminishing in this way till there was nothing of him left. But this was calumny, for Dolly Drone was very fond of his brother, and Lord Hornette reciprocated the sentiment when the weather was wet and he had no one else to talk to.

Mayrose could not complain that these old friends of his showed him any neglect. On the contrary, they made much of him, as if he were an orange to be squeezed for its fresh juice's sake; but so long as the ladies were in the room the conversation bubbled unsubstantially as the globules in champagne, and Mayrose could not get at what he rather impatiently wanted—the real minds of his interlocutors. It may be asked whether he expected every person present to hold forth as to his or her opinions, laying down propositions to be debated at length and thoughtfully pondered? Not he; but the creamy persiflage kept up for the amusement of Lady Rosemary and her daughters, and in some degree for his own behoof, told him nothing but what he had learned in such heathen countries as Paris, where a lively disbelief in everything human and extra-human forms the basis of public ethics. Though loving women's society, he was not altogether sorry when Lady Rosemary retired, and when the Earl set the example of drawing his chair near the fire, and bidding the decanters circulate. He was now alone with as select a committee of the British governing class as could have been mustered—a past and future Minister, two members of Parliament, and a guider of public opinion—nay, a man who was public opinion incarnate. So by way of improving himself, he said, "That was a puzzling leader in this morning's *Times*. What policy will Parliament really follow this session?"

At this even Lord Dolly's round face broke into a smile, and Mayrose found he would have done better to leave it alone.

"Policy!" said bitter Mr. Nines, lifting up his glass to the gaslight; "policy is a word of complex meaning apt to mislead the vulgar. You hold that knife in your hand and want to know my opinion on it. I wait till you have said 'It's sharp,' then I answer with conviction 'It's blunt.' You pass the knife on to me, and I look at it edgewise as you did; then it's my turn to say 'This is a sharp knife.'"

"Mr. Nines means we have got the knife in our hands for the present," laughed Lord Rosemary, just dipping his lips in Chateau Lafitte.

"Quite so, my lord," replied Mr. Nines, modestly.

"What knife?" enquired Dolly Drone, who understood letterpress letter than metaphor.

"Dolly's heavy to-night," said his noble brother, humourously. "You can't do better than follow Paramount, Mayrose; he leads us over queer bits of country now and then, but there are no bones broken in the end."

"And if they were, broken bones could be set," was Mr. Nines' placid rejoinder.

"Well, I daresay I shall get used to your philosophy," said Mayrose, hopefully; but as he perceived that politics was to them all as a field strewn with eggs, he talked to Lord Rosemary about the latter's golden pheasants, whilst Mr. Nines compared notes with Lords Hornette and Dolly Drone about the divers topics that agitated their respective clubs—chiefly horse topics.

"Well," said Lady Rosemary, making room for Mayrose on her sofa as the gentlemen entered the drawing room, where Zellie and Violet were preparing to play a duet on the piano—"well, do you still want the keynote from me, or are you beginning to feel more in tune with our thoughts?"

"Thanks, I find I have caught the tune," smiled Mayrose, "and an easy tune it is."

CHAPTER VII.

ZELLIE'S BROTHER.

The next morning Lord Dolly Drone, in a striking costume of brown velvet, went out to shoot with Mr. Nines, who peppered his game through an eyeglass, and Lord Rosemary rode off with Zellie and Violet to pay a visit to some neighbours, attended by Lord Hornette. Mayrose was pressed to join both parties, but he stayed behind and spent the day with Lady Rosemary.

"I think we both want to have a long chat with each other," said the Countess to him as she took his arm for a stroll through the park. "You shall come with me to my dairy, and then to the village, and we will lunch alone."

"It will remind me of old times, dear lady Rosemary."

They were indeed both pleased to be with each other, and the concerns of the dairy were not so engrossing but that they found time to converse much as mother and son would have done. Lady Rosemary had been more struck than she cared to conceal with the manly character, the frankness and engaging simplicity of the young man who had come back and was craving her patronage. He, on his side, was touched and charmed to meet in his gentle protectress the same unaltered and gracious affection he had always experienced from her as a boy. They walked the grass under the avenue of trees with flocks of cawing rooks circling overhead, and soon Lady Rosemary said—

"It's a positive misfortune for you, my poor boy, that you should be a peer. You might have had so brilliant a career in the House of Commons."

"It may seem presumptuous in me to say so, but I have wished myself that I had had to carve my own way in life."

"You can make a great name as it is," continued Lady Rosemary; "but it must be by other means than if you had been a commoner. If your poor father were still alive your own merits would have been enough, but now as a peer you want money, and much of it—large landed influence especially. You know Sir Ham Pennywoddle?"

"He has asked me for my support in Hiveborough."

"And you have promised it him?"

"No, I thought of refusing; but I wished for your advice."

"I should say by all means make a friend of him—he would be a most valuable ally. His wealth is very great, they tell me."

"Oyster-shells innumerable; but what a man!"

"We cannot always choose our helpmates, Freddy; and then this one is honest. You must not blame him for his want of education."

"I should say his education had been excellent, especially the arithmetic."

"That's unkind. Sir Ham has been laborious and successful. He has only one child left now—a daughter."

"Heiress to all our old estates. Oh! Lady Rosemary, you are not going to tell me that I ought to marry that little bank of 'Change scrip!" and as Mayrose said this, half laughing, the sisterly kiss which Zellie Carol had given him the day before seemed to kindle back on his cheek in a blush.

Lady Rosemary reddened and looked up at him. She was very motherly with that tinge of emotion lighting up her soft eyes. It was an emotion of pride in him, for she loved him the more for his spirited answer. Nevertheless she replied—

"I will be truthful with you, Freddy; and I confess that when I heard of Mr. Pennywoddle's death and of your return I thought that if you married Miss Pennywoddle it would be a happy thing for you. She is pretty, I hear, and well-bred—girls are educated so much alike, you know, nowadays—and then you are a man to whom any woman would devote her life. It might not have been a love-match at first, but it would have ended in love."

"Everybody seems to consider the end in our times, and to skip over the means," said Mayrose, with a smile. "I do not know what countenance I should keep if I met Miss Pennywoddle, for my lawyer, good Mr. Deedes, was driving at this idea all Sunday evening—diplomatically as he imagined."

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"I had not seen you, Freddy, when the thought occurred to me. Now you are back beside me, I feel that I did you an injury. You will find plenty of other heiresses—beautiful and noble girls—worthier of you!"

"Why heiresses, dear Lady Rosemary? I should be content with less."

"Well, one must not be too romantic; but we must think now about the immediate present. You will see Mr. Paramount to-day, and he will be able to grow acquainted with you by Monday. He will advise you to speak in the House of Lords as soon as possible."

"I hope we may get on as well after my speech as before it."

"That you must contrive to do. Submit to a little discipline at first. You will see others besides Mr. Paramount—Lord and Lady Beaujolais, Lady Coral-mere, and Colonel Dandelion, the 'Whip,' are coming."

So in this way they saw the dairy and village, returning to luncheon when the sun had melted all the silver-frosting off the tree branches, and was making every twig glisten with a dozen diamonds. Herds of fallow-deer, forsaking the sheds which sheltered them at the night and in the cold of morning, were trooping out to browse over the wet grass; russet squirrels scampered across the pathways and climbed, frightened, up the tree-barks; and the Pennywoddles lapsed out of discussion as they had done in the conversation with Mr. Deedes. But Mayrose could not quite dismiss them from his musings, for they were recurring too importunately. When, luncheon being over, Lady Rosemary withdrew to occupy herself about the rooms preparing for her great guests, Mayrose sallied out for a solitary ramble, and found himself on the terrace with the six macaws, who began forthwith marking time in his honour as before. But he looked at them absently as he lit a cigar.

What was it that drew him then towards the exact spot where Zellie had alighted from her horse and come towards him holding out her hands? By looking he could have found the mark of her little boot-heel imprinted in the gravel, and followed her steps to the place where he had kissed her. He did look, and stood for several minutes tracing rounds dreamily with his stick, whilst the smoke of his cigar floated above him in blue spirals. He had not yet moved when—just as yesterday—a sound of cantering aroused him, and once again he saw Zellie coming down the bridle-path, with Lord Hornette riding beside her. Involuntarily Mayrose turned aside behind a cluster of lilac bushes, and this time he passed unperceived. Zellie and her companion must have distanced Lord Rosemary and Violet; and now, being near home, they drew in and their horses fell into a walk. Zellie's tinkling laughter was rippling through the air, and as the two went by Mayrose could hear his own name pronounced.

"Upon my soul, I was jealous, Lady Zell!" said Lord Hornette, in his crisp, dry tones.

"Jealous of whom? Why, Freddy is like our brother."

"Yes; but he's not your brother."

"No; but that's why we treat him as if he were. Violet and I would love to be his sisters."

"Well, I should love—and yet, no, I'm glad I am not your brother, Lady Zell."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. PARAMOUNT.

Elmwood when habited only by the family and by familiar guests, and Elmwood putting on its state to receive such a visitor as Mr. Paramount, were different places. All sorts of unexpected rooms broke into light. Battalions of satin chairs blazed in the rays of countless wax-tapers clustering in chandeliers of crystal or gold; dining was transferred from the snug saloon of twelve to a room with a vaulted dome painted by Boucher and with panels of Watteau's; and the sideboards groaned under an array of plate worth the ransom of a king, or even two kings, as kings go.

Lastly, the footmen were all-glorious in their liveries of gala, pink calves, and snow-powder.

Mr. Paramount was not the man to disdain such pomp. If he had a weakness it was for the surroundings which great wealth affords. Pictures, gorgeous furniture, satin menus, wines of rare brand, choice music, and rich hues of ladies' dresses, filled his purple imagination with Oriental visions unavowed; and dreaming himself an Asian potentate, he was perhaps consoled for long exclusions from Downing-street. Birth had a lesser fascination in his eyes, for besides certain races who trace their descent from the infancy of time—and nobly record the fact in their facial lineaments—the pedigrees of modern peers are small things indeed; and in trying to persuade himself and those whom it concerned that he venerated these small things, Mr. Paramount rather overdid it. A playful talker withal, it was only betimes that he soared into the empyrean of mystic speech, understood of none save himself. But on such occasions he would quickly fold his wings and come to earth again out of pity for the waddlers who were unable to fly with him so high. As we all of us have our secret griefs, Mr. Paramount's secret grief was doubtless the not having been born an Italian or a Frenchman, in order that he might have ruled a people worthy to comprehend him and to cleave the heavens in his train. We are not a strong-pinioned race, or, at least, we make no use of our pinions.

"Mr. Paramount, let me re-introduce to you Lord Mayrose," said Lady Rosemary, in a voice and with an eloquent gesture which proved that this was no ordinary presentation.

Mayrose bowed, but Mr. Paramount held out his hand. Like Louis XIV., he forgot nothing, not even a school-boy with whom he had conversed about foxes. He gave Mayrose to infer that he had thought of him oftentimes and with much hopefulness; that he was pleased to see how well the promises of his boyhood had been kept; and that he augured grandly of him. All this in half-a-dozen words. The words may have been mere honey; but more flies have been caught with honey than with vinegar.

Other presentations followed—to Lord and Lady Beaujolais, both towers of night in Mr. Paramount's party; to the bewitching Countess of Coralmer, worth a host in herself; and to Colonel Dandelion, who had lost much of his hair from thinking about the public weal, but none of his energy. All these persons paid more than a common regard to Mayrose, for somehow the rumour had got about that a rising man had arrived at Elmwood. The unconcealed enthusiasm of Lady Rosemary may have been at the bottom of the rumour; but Lady Rosemary was known to be a judge of men, and not likely to be misled by her affection into taking potters' clay for porcelain. Then the two brothers, Lords Hornette and Dolly Drone were beginning to show Mayrose a novel respect—given grudgingly in the case of Lord Hornette and with a puzzled air by Dolly Drone, for he had once rowed stroke in the boat where Mayrose had pulled "seven," and this sort of thing establishes a superiority that ought by rights to be continued during a life-time. But the brothers felt that Mayrose had stolen a march on them, and they had the good grace to submit to what was past helping. As to the ladies, they quickly discerned that Mayrose was unaffected, simple, full of gaiety, of manners polished beyond English wont, and richly handsome. Lady Coralmer glanced frequently at him over her fan during the ten minutes in the drawing room before dinner was announced. She was the young wife of a statesman—not present at Elmwood—who had been expected to die every month for some years past, but tarried in fulfilling the general expectation. He had been important and acute once, but had grown deaf since he had ceased to hear the world talk about him; and now his wife went into society alone, being courted by a bevy of gentlemen who read the obituaries every morning with a natural gratification at never finding Lord Coralmer in it. Lady Beaujolais ruled Lord Beaujolais, who lorded it over the South Hiveshire pack; and she too examined Mayrose with that furtive attention of ladies curious to see whether the intellect of a handsome stranger matches with his outer envelope. Lord Beaujolais had a bright determined face, and was remarkable in the world's eyes for his promptness in taking decisive resolutions, which his wife passed her time in adroitly bringing to nought. He wore the azure riband of

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St. Patrick over his waistcoat, and Lord Rosemary the darker one of the Garter. The ladies were all very bravely arrayed, out of deference to Mr. Paramount. Their dresses had come over from Paris in double-tinned-packing cases; and nothing could exceed the winsome finery of Zellie and Violet Carol. Zellie wore a dress of white silk, looped up with bunches of violets, her sister one similar, but blossoming with the lighter violets of Parma.

After the dinner, in the conception of which the *chef* of Elmwood had passed many a wakeful night, there was music in the state drawing-room, and Zellie and Violet sang ballads which Mr. Paramount loved. It was good to see Lord Hornette turning over the leaves of the music-books and mark his approval by bravos, all the more sincere as his lordship had once stood up in a public concert when the *Ciel Creve* quadrilles were being played, under the impression that it was "God Save the Queen" he heard. Dolly Drone was one of the gentlemen who butterflied persistently round Lady Coralmere both in town and country. He sat down beside her, expressing a hope that the Earl's health was improved, and was still earnestly trying to remember specifics for deafness when the tea was brought in. Mr. Nines, who had had the tact to feel that he might be one too many in a circle where matters of State polity were to be discussed, had left Elmwood after his shooting, carrying with him the best wishes of everybody and a hamper of game. So when Colonel Dandelion had betaken himself to the inspection of artistic albums, with Violet Carol for his expoundress, Mayrose was left to form one of the quorum who sat round the fire listening to what notable things fell from the lips of Mr. Paramount.

"We shall have a hard-working ally henceforth in Lord Mayrose," said Lady Rosemary, in her sweet voice. "Our young friend does not mean to make of politics a mere pastime."

"I foresee that Lord Mayrose will be a pride to us all," said Mr. Paramount, with a courtly seriousness that make his most stilted compliments acceptable.

"We must all go and hear your maiden-speech, Lord Mayrose," graciously remarked Lady Beaujolais, who was young, pretty, and had matchless hands, which she was quite right to flash about as she did. "I wish I were a man and could speak in public; but I should say much bitterer things than you gentlemen ever do. I do not understand apathy in politics."

"My wife would like to ride down people," bluffly laughed Lord Beaujolais, stroking his well-trimmed hay-colored beard.

"You have taken your seat, have you not, Mayrose?"

"Yes; I was introduced just before I went abroad."

"I have always felt curious to see a debate in a foreign Assembly," said Lord Rosemary, in the bland tone he would have said, "I should like to go to the Zoological Gardens." "I would almost cross over to France for the purpose."

"Ah, French speakers! it warms you to listen to them," exclaimed Lady Beaujolais. "We heard a young man last Easter who was defying the Ministry to shoot people. One could picture the rattle of musketry."

"It is like tonic," smiled Lady Coralmere, joining the circle with Dolly Drone. "I would not mind musketry under my windows if I could hear a stirring speech after it."

"Very unpleasant in the streets, though," put in honest Dolly Drone. "We had something like musketry last season. The mob broke our windows with stones."

"And a shootable lot they were," ejaculated Lord Hornette, arriving too, prim as an automaton, and fetching a chair for Zellie.

"Mr. Paramount spoke stirringly enough after the window breaking," said Lady Rosemary, with adroit homage.

"I should have done better, perhaps, if there had been a few rifles, dear Lady Rosemary," smiled this great personage.

"The best of foreign parties is that they do vote like one man," declared Colonel Dandelion, whose remnant of hair was carefully brushed up in two peaks on either side of his forehead, like points of admiration. "They never have counts out, and you can depend upon them for a gas bill as for a Reform debate."

"It is because they are so splendidly in earnest," interposed Lady Beaujolais, beating down her dazzling velvet and lace skirt.

"Oh! do you call that earnestness?" asked Lord Hornette in dismay. "Just fancy how it would be if Dandelion kept us in the house every day from four till three in the morning during six months of the year!"

"Yes, and remember those foreigners are paid for it," observed Dolly Drone sapiently.

"They get a pound a day, which seems a large sum to them."

"I don't think you would mind sitting eleven hours every night to do your duty, would you, Lord Mayrose?" asked pretty Lady Coralmer, to the great distress of Lady Drone, who thought that his own remissness was thereby being censured.

"Well, I should like to get my pound afterwards," said Mayrose with a laugh; and this reply helped to direct the conversation into a new channel, wherein the ways of foreigners, their literature, and religious vagaries gave the illustrious guest of the evening a text for brilliant improvisation.

It had been understood that Mr. Paramount had visited Elmwood for the purpose of conferring with his principal followers as to the line of policy which he and they were to adopt during the approaching session. The session was expected to be an important one, which means that Mr. Paramount hoped to turn out the Government, and in the judicious way peculiar to himself, he certainly did confer with Lady Rosemary and Lady Beaujolais—speaking for their respected husbands, present the while but non-voting—as to the manner in which this might be most satisfactorily done. When Mr. Paramount conferred he did so by explaining at due length, and with no lack of periphrases, why he had not yet made up his mind; or if he had made up his mind he gave out his plans in instalments—one piece to-day, another piece some days later, for they were plans which generally needed to be digested at leisure—never plans that could be swallowed at a gulp. Mayrose was admitted to several conferences, at which Mr. Paramount hesitatingly announced that after mature reflection he had concluded to plan nothing; and from this eventful date Colonel Dandelion did not scruple to speak with Mayrose about his (the colonel's) preferences for snipe over woodcock, as if the Viscount were now a possible member of some future Administration, and might be trusted with State secrets. Mayrose himself grew to feel that under the sheltering wing of Lady Rosemary, and with Ladies Beaujolais and Coralmer to support him with their small but strong hands, he had only to distinguish himself by a series of solid speeches and he would then obtain something from Mr. Paramount—not unlikely an under-secretaryship. During the three days between Friday and Monday he became ripely acquainted with Mr. Paramount, and the great Mr. Paramount with him. He even had an uninterrupted hour with this astute leader of men walking home from afternoon service in a rustic church five miles off; and Mr. Paramount benevolently advised him to master some question engrossing the public mind—say the blue books on the treaty with King Coccoanib. It was inevitable there would be momentous debates on the treaty and subsequent war with King Coccoanib, at the very outset of the session, and if Mayrose showed himself conversant with the whole question he might be put up to ask the Colonial Secretary for more papers. Thus said Mr. Paramount, and when he went away on the Monday afternoon he shook his hopeful young follower very courteously by the hand and promised to send him some documents of special information concerning Coccoanib, to the end that when Mayrose stood up to ask the Colonial Secretary for more papers he might worry that Right Honourable Personage by some unexpected and biting remarks.

"You have quite won his heart," said Lady Rosemary that same evening.

"I wish I could believe he had convictions," sighed Mayrose; "he instills no enthusiasm."

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CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MARY PENNYWODDLE RECEIVES A CAMELIA.

Whilst the welfare of England was thus being cared for at Elmwood, Sir Ham Pennywoddle was not unmindful of Parliament or of his Oyster Shells. Two days after the funeral of Micah Pennywoddle the Oyster Shell Company at its half-yearly meeting declared a dividend of fifteen per cent., and the shares rose in a manner which much comforted Sir Ham in his affliction. He called on Mr. Deedes after the meeting and remained closeted with him for two hours. Then he returned to Penny by the express which leaves London at five; and on the following morning after breakfast set out alone in his black clothes for what he called a country walk.

He was not generally a walking man. Nature had not intended that he should be when she gave him a pair of legs round as cylinders, and a waist overjuttet those legs to an extent unfavourable to locomotion. But the Warden of the Sausage-Makers reckoned with his head, not with his legs; and his head on this particular morning took his legs in the direction of Springfield Park. Once arrived here, he steadily reconnoitred the lodges; passing his hand over the walls to see whether they were stone or stucco—they were stucco; and went the length of climbing on to the hedge bank opposite to see whether the roofs were in good repair. Then he pulled the bell, which had a buck's foot for its handle, and obtained admittance.

"I should like to visit this place," he said to a tidy woman who swung the gate back on its hinges.

"Yes, sir, if you please," answered the tidy woman, closing the gate behind him.

Springfield was open to all visitors. Archæologists frequently came there to burrow, and artists to sketch; and those who pleased might stroll through the apartments under the guidance of the housekeeper. The tidy woman directed Sir Ham to walk straight in front of him, and to ring at the main entrance when he reached the hall; which things Sir Ham did, but not without whiling away an hour in the park scrutinizing the turf, the trees, the gravel—as he had done the lodges. Once or twice he paused, poked a chesnut tree or oak with his umbrella, and looked up into the branches. Then he walked further on, picked a piece of moss off some bark with his black gloves, and turned it over as if it were a sample of something purchasable. When he had spent his hour in this way, he made as though he would go back and count all the trees one by one; but there were too many of them, so with his web-footed gait he struck across a piece of lawn, examined two statues—one of a faun, the other of a wood nymph—which seemed to strike him as vain productions, and passed into the quadrangle. Springfield was built on the plan of University Colleges, which was that of most noble demesnes erected in the sixteenth century. To the right of the quadrangle was a chapel, to the left a banqueting-hall with stained-glass windows; the central block of two-storied buildings which connected these edifices contained the dwelling apartments. In the centre of the grass-plat that enlivened the quadrangle rose a gray marble fountain, crowned with a circle of dolphins and a Naiad with an urn, all in bronze. There was no water in the fountain, the marble had long been full of dry weeds, and the bronze was verdigrised; but some workmen were busy cleaning it with scrapers, and had dug a conduit over the plat. Sir Ham enquired and learned that the leaden pipes, which had suffered from disuse, were being mended. This reply appeared to satisfy him; he ascended the steps that led to the front door, and rang as he had been enjoined. Another tidy woman answered the summons, but this time one in flustering silk and smart cap-strings, who looked as if the house were to all intents hers, and who was known to the workmen who were unwinding the pipes as Mrs. Bussleigh.

"I am Sir Ham Pennywoddle," said the knight, but without exhibiting his card; "and I should like to see all that is to be seen if it ain't too much trouble."

"Please step in, sir," answered Mrs. Bussleigh, respectfully; "his lordship is

away at present, but you will find things as if he were living here, for we expect him back soon."

This was what Sir Ham wanted. He strode up to a coat of armour and tapped it with his finger. Like the entrance hall of Elmwood, which the Warden of the Sansage-Makers had not seen, that of Springfield was baronially decorated with hunting and military trophies; but the shields and helmets predominated over the stags' heads, for the Springfields had been a long line of soldiers; the present Lord Mayrose being indeed the only one who had never worn a sword. This fact Mrs. Bussleigh explained to Sir Ham at once, for it was an item that was communicated to the visitor as soon as he crossed the threshold, and just before stepping into the renowned library that lay to the right.

"What's this?" asked Sir Ham, thrusting his finger through a round hole that disfigured one of the breastplates. His apparent meaning was, "Why don't they mend this hole?"

"That, sir, must have been worn by some poor fellow who was killed. These are retainers' armour. In the armoury up stairs you will see the breastplates and helmets worn by his lordship's ancestors. The cuirasses of the first Lord Mayrose, killed at Worcester, is riddled right through. Another Lord Mayrose died at Fontenoy, sir, and we have his coat. The fifth Lord Mayrose—he was an admiral—was killed in the action with the French off Ushant. I will show you the cocked hat he wore, sir."

Sir Ham seemed in no wise hasty to view the cocked hat or any other of the articles of apparel which had been injured by war; but he displayed an uncommon patience in examining the furniture, paintings, window-curtains, looking-glasses, china ornaments, everything down to the fire irons in the apartments. When he came to a sofa he sat down on it; when he reached the beds he pummelled the mattresses gently with his fist, and heard with pleasure the assurance, "All feather, sir." There was no end to the chambers, unlocked one after the other, and all ready to be habited so soon as a few logs should be set to blaze in the capacious chimneys. After that smash to which we have once or twice alluded, Springfield had not passed through the hands of that godson of Ruin, the Auctioneer. Enough had been saved to prevent this desecration, and it continued to be the fit and splendid residence of a great noble. Sir Ham did not complain of the time it took to tread over the acres of carpet, pause at all the pictures, and be initiated into the history of the countless heirlooms. When he was introduced into the library, walled from roof to flooring with valuable books—as to their value he knew nought, but he judged by the bindings—when he paced the chapel and found the stalls and pews were of solid oak; when the doors of the banqueting hall, groaning back to let him pass, showed him tables running in long rows as if ready for the feasting of a city, and the vault of chestnut wood in which, as the housekeeper explained, no spiders had ever spun their webs, he grunted softly with some significance; and when finally Mrs. Bussleigh apprised him that the plate was safe, and lodged in the Bank of England, he ventured on a smile. He did more, and gave Mrs. Bussleigh a sovereign, adding—

"It may be that I'll bring my family here one of these days, perhaps to-morrow, if it ain't inconvenient."

"No inconvenience whatever, if you please, sir," answered Mrs. Bussleigh, curtsying; and after this Sir Ham went his way.

He would have liked to ride home, for he had seen what he wished to see; and his legs being no longer sustained by the settled purpose of his head gave him some trouble over the five miles that separated him from Penny. But he strutted sturdily, solacing himself with a pause and a wheeze now and then; and as soon as he had reached home sought out the room where his wife and daughter were working mournfully, having none of the excitement of oyster-shells to lighten their bereavement.

Sir Ham fastened his smooth, gooseberry eyes on them.

"It ain't no use being downcast, my dears," said he, taking up his position on the hearth-rug, and speaking with a slight quaver, for he had not yet had time to get used to the sight of the crape dresses, and every time he looked upon them his

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heart twinged. "We must bear up, my dears," continued he, drawing off his black gloves methodically and with some labour by reason of the fatness of his finger-joints.

His daughter Mary, who was a girl of nineteen, with prim little collar and cuffs, rose and kissed him. Sir Ham was wont to say, "That girl is the living image of what I used to be;" but the friends who assented to this were probably courteous friends, unprone to argument, for Miss Mary was undeniably pretty, and looked unaffected.

"What should you say to a visit to Springfield, Mary?" began Sir Ham, stroking the girl's hair, which she wore neatly plaited down, not crimped, as the fashion was and is. "You must pick up your colour again, and the sooner the better, for life ain't to be spent in crying. We'll go to-morrow."

"We couldn't a-bear to see company yet, Ham," murmured Lady Pennywoddle, who was a mild and plentiful person like her husband, and had sold save-loys behind his counter when he had set up in business in Pickle Alley, Cornhill.

"There won't be company, Jane, and if there were it would only be Lord Mayrose, who came to poor Mike's burying—a gentlemanly young man. But he's away. I only want to show you the place just to cheer you a bit. It'll be better than doing those slippers all day."

"They're for the parson," sighed Lady Pennywoddle, looking at her work, which was scarlet, yellow, and most other colours, intermixed with splashes of beads for relief.

Mary Pennywoddle was accustomed to do what her father and mother bade her simply. She had never seen Lord Mayrose, though she had heard of him rather repeatedly of late, and there was no reason why she should not go to see Springfield if it so pleased Sir Ham. She was a rather positive little person, with nut-brown eyes and a shrewd smile, who had been educated at what was styled a fashionable young ladies' academy at Brighton, and she had never known her parents in the sausage-selling period of their career. Being better taught than they, and full of accomplishments of which they could not even pronounce the names, it would have been natural and filial that she should have felt politely impatient in their society; but her training—or rather certain qualities of heart which directed the same—had produced just the contrary effect upon her. Nothing was more attractive to her than to hear from her mother how that shop in Pickle Alley had been managed. Sir Ham, who had caught them once or twice discussing reminiscences of how much the black-puddings used to fetch and where the brawns used to stand, had interdicted the undesirable topic. But his prohibition only led to the exercise of that greater prudence which devolves on conspirators, and the choice of hours when the various commodities that make up a thriving pork store might be treated of with comfort became one of the pre-occupations of their lives. In expatiating on the trials and triumphs of pigs'-meat selling, Lady Pennywoddle kindled into a savoury eloquence, and if Miss Mary had been allowed to shape out her own destiny she would certainly not have aspired to marry a bishop or a dragoon as divers other young ladies at the Brighton school, but have modestly claimed the white apron and the carving-knife which her mother had discarded long years ago, when Sir Ham had waxed rich and worshipful.

It happened, therefore, that the sights which had so much moved Sir Ham passed before his daughter's eyes like a rather wearisome panorama. The heavy landau of the Pennywoddles jolted the knight, his lady, and Miss Mary to the entrance hall, behind the fountain still mending; and again Mrs. Bussleigh appeared with jingling keys at her waist and profuse curtseying. But Miss Mary thought Penny a finer place than Springfield; and Lady Pennywoddle derived no gratification from the breastplates. Sir Ham sat upon the sofas as before and pummelled the mattresses in the bedrooms, adding, of his own authority this time, "All feather, Mary." But Miss Mary repeated that the chairs at Penny were much smarter than these in faded tapestry, and she wondered naively how any one could sleep in those huge beds without dreaming of ghosts. So they went the whole round of the house with languor, and were emerging from the dining-hall after what seemed to Miss Mary a truly interminable review of old gimcracks, when at

last—and to the no little relief of Sir Ham, whose features had been lengthening gruesomely—his daughter evinced signs of admiration. A conservatory full of rare camelias bordered one whole side of the garden that stood behind the hall, and Miss Mary could see the graceful flowers rearing their heads in bunches of white, scarlet, and pink through the glass doors.

Camelias always have a fascination for women, and a cynic might say that there is some analogy between the snowy, lithe, brittle flower which fritters away at the touch and the brilliant, fickle nature of women.

"Oh, these are lovely flowers!" exclaimed Mary Pennywoddle. "I should almost like to have a white one to carry away."

"Unfortunately I have not the key, miss. It's only the gardener and his lordship who have keys," apologized Mrs. Bussleigh. "If I had known you had been coming, Sir Ham, the gardener should have been here—"

"If you like camillas, Mary, I'll buy some for you in 'Covent Garden,' interrupted fatherly Sir Ham; and the family grouped themselves round the door, Lady Pennywoddle wondering in her inner soul how much such flowers would cost the dozen. But this day was not to pass off without Miss Mary's longing being appeased, and that in a surprising way, for while she was repeating that camelias were the flowers she most dearly loved, a light tread broke over the gravel, and Sir Ham, who had turned round to take stock of the conservatory's iron frame, uttered a muffled exclamation: "Jane—Mary, here's Lord Mayrose himself."

Mayrose had in fact ridden over from Elmwood to see if there were any letters awaiting him, or matters to be attended to, and also to bring back the Blue-book on that treaty with Coccoanib, of which no copy could be found at Elmwood. He was not going to stay above an hour, but had passed through the garden to order a bouquet of his camelias to be made up for Lady Rosemary. He was in hunting-boots, carried a whip under his arm, and had drawn the key of the conservatory from his pocket, when Sir Ham and his belongings blossomed on his view. He put on a quick, kind expression, and threw away the inseparable cigar he carried.

"My lord, we took the liberty," stuttered the Warden of the Sausage-makers, bustling forward with noticeable radiance.

"I only regret that I was not at home to receive you," answered Mayrose, lifting his hat with the grace which went to the hearts of all the women he knew, and shaking hands with Sir Ham he advanced towards the ladies.

"Lady Pennywoddle, my lord, and my daughter Mary—" "Mary, Viscount Mayrose," said the knight, whose keen eyes it did not escape that the cigar which the peer had thrown away was well-nigh a whole one—a token of civility which puzzled him.

"I see you were admiring my camelias," said Mayrose. "Will you allow me to show them to you?" and he turned the key in the lock. "I think my gardener is a little proud of his conservatory."

"Pass in Jane—pass in, Mary; it's very kind of your lordship" reiterated Sir Ham. "We were just enjoying ourselves in this beautiful place as a bit of comfort after our troubles."

"You will always be welcome, Sir Ham. But did I not hear Miss Pennywoddle wish for a flower?" And breaking off the fairest within reach he bowed and handed it to her.

Thus was the way Mary Pennywoddle when she rode home had a white camelia. And why Mayrose on his way back to Elmwood later in the afternoon was more absent than when he had come thence in the morning.

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CHAPTER X.

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

It was a hazard that had taken Mayrose to Springfield ; but it was not a hazard which made him say nothing to Lady Rosemary about his meeting with Mary Pennywoddle. Without being able to account for his reticence, he felt that he would keep his counsel on this subject even if he were talking confidentially with the Countess. There was a spice of ludicrousness in the chance that brought these Pennywoddles across his path at every corner. Sir Ham was beginning to appear to him in his dreams, and he was certain that he should blush if Lady Rosemary asked him, with her searching and rather humorous eyes, whether he had found Miss Pennywoddle pretty. For he had found her pretty, and his surprise had been considerable at encountering a girl at once comely and so unaffected under the protection of the Sausage-maker. However, Mayrose had for several days no opportunity of private talk with the Countess. Mr. Paramount gone, Lord and Lady Beaujolais, Lady Coralmer, and the Drone brothers remained at Elmwood, and a week was passed in festivities which it required all Lady Rosemary's leisure to superintend. As the family were to quit Elmwood at the opening of the session, the moment had come for liquidating the arrears of civilities due to small county folks ; and for seven days an interminable procession of magistrates, vicars, doctors, and mayors, with their feminine encumbrances, filed through the dining-room at Elmwood. Lady Rosemary was the more anxious to leave none of them dinnerless, as she wished Mayrose to pick up the broken threads of his acquaintanceship with these sometime wearisome, but always useful persons.

In going to Springfield Mayrose had purposed to bring back with him the Blue-book on that treaty with King Cocoanib. As is most just, Blue-books are sent regularly to Peers throughout each session, and some five hundred of them would have accumulated during our friend's absence, had not his butler sold them profitably to a tobacconist for three-halfpence per pound as soon as they became twelve months old. The volume on King Cocoanib, however, having been issued at the close of the past session, lay with leaves uncut, at Springfield, whither it had been forwarded from town with the rest of the luggage ; and Mayrose returned with it strapped on his saddle, being minded to study its contents at Elmwood, as Mr. Paramount had suggested. But this proved to be not so easy. Except during odd half hours in his dressing-room, and a winkful hour in bed before extinguishing his candle, he had scarcely ten minutes in the day at his disposal. Lady Coralmer, under pretext of conversing with him about his affairs, and giving him good advice, talked with him prettily for whole mornings about hers, and claimed a sympathy not possible to refuse for the deaf and hard lived Lord Coralmer. Romantic Lady Beaujolais, who loved expeditions to tumble-down ruins, sandpits, and water-falls, would drive to these places of interest in a brisk pony-chaise, with Lady Coralmer beside her, and enlist Mayrose to sit behind and make them laugh all the way. With both ladies he had become a prime favourite at first sight. They educated him in the private chronicles of society, which gave him the notion that everybody and everything were just the reverse of what they were popularly supposed to be, and when he was out of the sight of these obliging instructresses then Zellie and Violet tugged at his sleeves, and were for taking him out to fish, visit, or follow the hounds.

All this was charming enough, and Mayrose had too great a liking for Zellie's and Violet's society not to court all occasions of enjoying it. But at the period we have reached it was just beginning to dawn insensibly upon him that, whilst his occasional assiduities towards Lady Coralmer—or rather hers towards him—caused a lengthening of the features of his friend Dolly Drone, so his unceremonious friendliness with Zellie jarred visibly on the nerves of Lord Hornette. This young Earl was all nerves. His impatient features had a trick of contracting into all sorts of frowning zigzags when he was crossed, and Mayrose too often perceived these uncomplimentary distortions on them. He had not forgotten the gallant words he had overheard behind the lilac trees, and he noticed that since that ride

with Lord Hornette Zellie had left off calling him Freddy. This would have been natural in any case, for it was hardly possible or even desirable that a familiarity born in childhood should continue now that he and Lady Rosemary's children had attained to what are often styled years of discretion, but might better be termed years of prudery. Still, Violet called him Freddy as before, nor did punctilious Lord Hornette urge any objection to it so far as she was concerned. Now as man is a whimsical being, Mayrose wished somehow, without caring to explain the wish, that the heir of the Bumblebeighs had read his lesson on the proprieties to the younger instead of the elder sister.

Things were in this pass when, two or three mornings after his excursion to Springfield, and before the prim little features of Mary Pennywoddle had yet had time to grow confused in his memory, Mayrose on coming down to breakfast was waylaid by this younger sister, who was dressed in her riding-habit, and ran out from the library to stop him. Her well-cut jacket fitted her as if she had been moulded in it; and she had a light blue kerchief round her neck, and the rich clusters of her auburn hair were massed under a small hat and veil set atilt in the most knowing way imaginable.

"I have lain in ambush for you, Freddy," said she, laughing, and putting the gold tip of her little riding whip on his arm; "you must come and hunt with us this morning."

"But I am not rigged out for hunting, Violet," answered he, surveying her with admiration as if she were a bright picture transferred alive from one of Herring's best sporting-cracks.

"Oh, but it will take you no time to put on your things," she replied, holding up her long skirt, under which her tiny boots and one silver spur could be seen. "The hounds meet at Kingschase, and it's always the best run of the season. Then, you've given enough of your time to Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere; Zellie and I want to have something of you."

"Are not Hornette and Dolly going with you?"

"Yes, but Dolly Drone is no fun for me unless he should tumble off his horse, which he never does," pouted Violet; "and as for Lord Hornette he speaks only to Zellie. Do come."

Mayrose had no objections to offer to a proposal thus urged. His tailor had just sent him down a suit of hunting things, and his bootmaker a triumphant pair of tops, which it was a pity to leave idling on their trees. Besides, this roving Englishman had not hunted for so long that he was doubtful of the figure he should cut in the field, and, like a resolute fellow as he was, he desired to allay his doubts without much delay.

"I think I'll obey you, Violet," said he, glancing at his watch, and only hesitating long enough to hear the invitation repeated; "but if I get broken you'll have to bring home the bits."

"You never came down in your life," protested Violet, incredulously. "Go and dress, and we'll wait breakfast for you. You're the same dear fellow as you ever were. You always do what you're told."

So in an hour from that time Mayrose, in new red attire, was riding to meet on one of Lord Rosemary's bravest hunters. It was a tepid morning, of the sort dear to sportsmen, with a southerly breeze driving clouds over the sky like flocks of grey sheep. Kingschase was too near to Elmwood to render a covert hack necessary, and on the road Mayrose was enabled to convince himself that he and his steed were likely to keep on good terms—a piece of conviction only procurable when the rider knows he is master of his beast, and not his beast master of him. Dolly Drone, who rode fifteen stone, and had a well-used coat, the dye of which, about the skirt, was as mashed cranberries, gave his friend sagacious hints as to how divers fences were to be taken in a stiffish part of the country for which the Kingschase foxes had a predilection. "You see," said he, "it's just like riding down a staircase, for they are all drop-fences, and the further you get towards Kingschase the worse it becomes. That's why we call it such a good country." Dolly was glad of Mayrose's presence, for when riding with Violet he was bound by his chivalry to gallop by her throughout the day; and this was tedious to his spirit, seeing

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that he loved to pound along by himself at a pace not much slower than steeple-chasing. Lord Hornette never left Zellie's side, and Mayrose's presence or absence was a matter of no moment to him, for he could ride with the best, and when he had a lady under his charge he monopolized her. On this day, however, it seemed as if a spell had lighted on the two brothers, for at the minute of reaching the meet Lord Hornette was suddenly seized with a cramp which made his face twinge, and shot out his right leg straight ahead of him like a railway signal. He was liable to these seizures, which in nowise daunted his pluck, but moved him to vigorous imprecations when there were no ladies at hand. Zellie reined in, and uttered a slight cry of alarm.

"It's nothing," groaned the Earl, between two spasms, and making a gesture to allay Zellie's fears as she questioned him with concern.

"It's that devilled pheasant at breakfast this morning," cried honest Dolly Drone, cantering up. "I told you last year, man; it always plays tricks with you."

"Just help me to get off, Doll!" gasped Lord Hornette, shooting at his imaginative brother a glance which would have riddled the latter right through had Dolly been susceptible to eye-artillery; and Lord Beaujolais trotting up at that minute with a squadron of other sportsmen who had been attracted by the incident, they were all profuse in advising the Earl to walk about for a few moments, and to stamp his foot if he could, which, as it happened, he couldn't. He stood leaning with all his weight between Dolly's stout arms, and thumping splenetically at his thigh, which felt, he said, as if all the bones had got tied in a knot. Dolly repeated it must be the devilled pheasant, but some of the other riders had known tea produce these effects, and Lord Beaujolais stated that nothing suited him so well as a glass of claret before hunting. It was a scene full of anxiety.

But meanwhile, the hounds had gone to work, and as foxes abounded they rapidly unearthed one, and started in pursuit.

The "whips" huskily bawled "Forrard, then!" Lord Beaujolais, who had his Master's duty to perform, turned at the cry, flung the patient a parting word of cheer as one pitches sixpence to a beggar, and was no more seen; and the other riders surrounding Lord Hornette tossed him similar words, then scattered away in an instant, like so many red leaves in a high wind.

"We can't leave you; we will see you home," said Zellie, who suffered sincerely to see her cramped companion biting his lips in the racking effort to put his leg straight.

But Lord Hornette was too fine a gentleman to spoil sport—above all, ladies' sport.

"No; please ride on, Lady Zell," he stammered, with a wry smile. "It's almost over now. Two grooms will take care of me."

"It looks so cruel to abandon you!" exclaimed Violet, whose chesnut mare was curvetting and straining towards the hounds, with nostrils agape.

"I shall be all right in a minute, thanks, and I'll follow you," repeated Lord Hornette, whose cramp now seemed in effect to be subsiding. "Mayrose, please see to Lady Zell." And as Dolly Drone was renewing his lamentations about the devilled pheasant, his affectionate brother cut him short with an order which admitted of no reply. They waited another minute to see that all danger was really past, and then, whilst the Earl was reviving, with a groom to hold up each of his elbows, Mayrose, Zellie, Violet, and Dolly Drone galloped after the rest of the field, and galloped hard to make up for lost time.

It has been said that Mayrose had done nothing in this way since his Cambridge days; and hunting is of all games that in which a man is liable to grow most rusty from non-practice. Hunting requires a fabric of qualities of which nerve is the mere groundwork, for it is not enough to ride straight or to be well screwed to the saddle. If a man cannot nurse his horse, gauge the amount of wind and muscle in him, and regulate his pace accordingly; if he cannot put himself into the animal's skin, breathe with his breath, and throb with his pulses, then a long run with a fast pack may bring him surprises more exciting than welcome. The Kingchase country was one which bristled with obstacles that to an average rider would have seemed vile, and to a foreigner downright murderous. The land

aloped as Dolly had said, and in parts was so steep that a beer-barrel set rolling by would have careered along by itself till stopped by one of the numerous staked hedges. Mayrose had never hunted over such a course before, and any experienced eye that had watched him start would have predicted small things of him, for, as in his driving so in his riding, he used up all the breeze in his horse, spinning him along as if his own dash and courage were more than enough for the pair of them. However for the first forty minutes his sinewy hunter seemed quite content at the prospect of affairs; and Mayrose covered his ground splendidly, with Zellie at his bridle to smile to and encourage him. He had fancied—though on second thoughts he rejected the idea—that she had brightened at having to ride with him instead of with Lord Hornette, and at all events she appeared more at ease with her old playmate than in the Earl's company. There was a lithe gracefulness in her horsemanship which dazzled her companion. She flew over hedges like a bird, weighing not an ounce on the reins with her clever little hands. When flakes of wet clay from the ditches splashed over her habit, when the moist soil of ploughed fields thudded up in clouds around her face, when brambles seemed to clutch at her and the wind to tear at her, she laughed merrily as if fear and she had never met.

"Hold on, old man, your pace is too hot," cried Dolly Drone, drawing alongside of Mayrose, and with Violet close to him. Dolly Drone never shirked pace by himself, but he practised moderation with ladies.

"It's not too fast," panted Zellie, keeping her habit down with her whip to prevent it from ballooning; and Violet, whose lips were apart, and whose eyes brimmed with the speed, cried, as her gambolsome mare bounded under her, "Don't check us; we want Freddy to be in at the death."

But Freddy was not fated to figure at the death at this time, for the fox, who was an old hand, led the hounds a dance of an hour and twenty minutes, and long before his capture Mayrose's mount was out of the running. Dolly Drone and Violet, who had kept behind at first, choosing their line of ground scientifically, passed by them; then others whom Mayrose and Zellie had overlapped and outstripped came up smoothly and went ahead, till at length, Mayrose, to his confusion, saw himself with Zellie at the tail of the field, and only the confirmed laggards behind. A few of those had dismounted and were examining their saddle-girths; others thought their horses had cast a shoe—the old stories, in short, of men who have had enough of it, and Mayrose chafed to be in their company. He tried the spurs, but his horse only quickened in a floundering way, and at this juncture there came a sturdy hedge looming up, with signs of a ditch beyond. Mayrose, altogether breathless, threw a glance at Zellie's horse—

"Can you take that hedge, or shall we turn off and look for a gate?"

"I can take it," gasped Zellie, as audibly as the wind, which was making a jew's-harp of her little teeth, would permit. Her horse was in a better condition than Mayrose's, and besides, she was too eager to be prudent. Lord Hornette had never left her to decide these questions for herself.

"Then I ought to do it," muttered Mayrose, doggedly, for he reasoned that what a lady's horse could do his ought to do, and with another dig of the spurs he bolted onwards to show Zellie the way. The hedge though was a nasty one, and the ditch beyond even nastier. It would have been a stiff jump at the outset of a run; with a tired horse it was a pure man-trap, and Mayrose's horse guessing the peril swerved abruptly, and turned tail. This was ominous, and should have warned Mayrose that an open gate is a good friend in need; but he had that indomitable, yet not unkind, firmness which insists on obedient service. So without using the spurs, but patting his horse on the neck, he brought him straight again, and this time the noble beast rose, plunged desperately at the obstacle with all the remnant of strength in him, but was only enabled to clear half the distance. He came down splashing with his fore feet on the ditch's bank, stumbled, and shot Mayrose half a dozen yards into the field beyond. Then rid of his load, he kicked back the mud and water and scrambled out, placidly.

Mayrose was lying like a scarlet heap, and the fall had been heavy enough to knock all the life out of an ordinary body. But temperance, soberness, and

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chastity seemed to have made his bones of india-rubber, for, though rudely shaken, he was not even insensible. Stumbling quickly to one knee, he raised his hands, and shouted to Zellie not to take the leap. He knew the spirited girl but little if he thought she would obey him in such a moment. She had seen him roll over on his face, and watching him try to rise perceived that he could not regain his feet, and was pressing his hand to his forehead. Without an instant's hesitation she turned, set her horse firmly at the break-neck fence, cleared it, and stood breathless by Mayrose's side. Three or four labourers at work in an adjoining field had hobbled down a bank and were scurrying towards the scene of the disaster, and one of the number had valiantly run after the horse, who was shaking his ears peacefully with no thought of flying away.

"Zellie! Zellie! Why did you do that!" stammered Mayrose, still on his knees and with affectionate reproach, for he saw she was pale as the white collar round her throat; even her lips were blanched.

"Are you hurt, Freddy?" was her only answer, as she rapidly dismounted without any assistance, then ran forward and tried to raise him by herself.

"No, no, thanks—only shaken; but it was worse than a second fall to see you expose yourself like that." The labourers throwing up huge clods under their shoes had reached him by this time, and were setting him on his legs. One of them pawed him to see that there were no bones broken.

"I am sure you are hurt, faltered Zellie, holding him under the arms, and trembling in every limb. "If you please fetch some water," she entreated of the labourers, feeling at the same time in Mayrose's pocket for his flask.

"There's my cottage hard by, mum," replied the man who was pawing; "but there's nought the matter wi' un. Come up, zur."

There was in truth nought the matter. The cropper had been a sharp one, and Mayrose felt as if his funny-bone had been crushed, and as if needles and pins were tingling to his finger-tips; also his head had a light sensation as though its root were gone. But after five minutes this giddiness wore off, and then propped up by Zellie on one side and by the countryman on the other, he found no difficulty in reaching the cottage. Here Zellie's anxiety should have decreased, but it did not, and the wistful expression in her eyes was very different to that which had come there when Lord Hornette had been writhing in his cramp torments. It flashed on Mayrose at this juncture that, in alluding some days before to a mild gentleman—one Mr. Buttercombe—who had come to grief in some turnips, she had laughed derisively at him, because, being only shaken, he had not climbed into the saddle again and finished the run, for both Zellie and Violet were generally pitiless towards want of pluck.

"That horse must think me a muff," shivered Mayrose, as the cottager deposited him in a Windsor arm-chair. "I shall have to beg his pardon before riding him home."

"Oh, but you mustn't think of riding him home!" exclaimed Zellie, almost sobbing, for she noticed that one of Mayrose's red sleeves was torn from elbow to shoulder, and she was putting her little hands into the rent to see if there was any blood. "We must send to Elmwood for a doctor and a carriage, and you must lie down, Freddy. But perhaps there's a doctor in the village!" added she, addressing the crowd of bumpkins around her in a supplicating tone.

"No, come, Zellie, I assure you I want no doctor," averred Mayrose, standing up unaided. "My elbow is only grazed. I shall feel like Mr. Buttercombe if you spoil me."

"Oh, how can you speak of Mr. Buttercombe! He was not hurt at all." Now Mr. Buttercombe had lighted on his hat, which had been crushed like a biffin, and the mud of many turnips had entered his eyes. However, when it was definitely seen that the rent in the coat-sleeve was the sum total of injury, and when Mayrose with a laugh struck out his arms obediently in all directions to prove that he had full command of them, Zellie at last consented to be pacified. The cottager's wife brought a mug of hot water, into which—her knowledge of remedies being naively British—she poured full half of the brandy flask, and Mayrose was forced by Zellie to drink this fiery dram of comfort much against his will. The entire feminine contingent

of the village, with a clump of corduroyed boys, had turned out to stare at the two horses which the labourers were holding, and the boys were flattening their noses against the diamond panes of the cottage casements to see how the "cove" fared. To them the episode was a welcome break in the monotony of life, and doubtless they regretted its premature ending. Half an hour after entering the cottage Mayrose left it, thrusting a sovereign into his host's hands to pay for that mug of hot water; and having lifted Zellie into her saddle he sprang easily into his own, looking none the worse for what had befallen him. They were ten miles from home, and the road, with its walling of tall hedges and pathside bordering of velvet grass, lay smooth and straight before them, with no threats of further sensation for that day. For all which, Mayrose never forgot that ride home—Zellie's watchfulness following him at every step, her plaintive entreaties to him not to go fast, and the sudden blush that suffused her face when, reining in his horse in a by-lane, Mayrose held out his hand to her with brotherly gratitude and thanked her for her solicitude. This was the first time she had ever blushed with him.

They rode on almost in silence after this, for though Mayrose endeavored to chat, there was a something between them which made conversation flag. Zellie's nervousness seemed rather to grow than to abate as the apparent causes of it diminished; and when they reached Elmwood she had become quite silent. But here an eventful incident occurred. Lord Hornette was in the house, for he had not been able fully to shake off his cramp till the hounds were past catching, and so had ridden back and spent his morning, trying to amuse the three countesses, who—be it said in nowise to his disparagement—found his dry-cut remarks not quite a substitute for Mayrose's genial banter. Zellie walked hurriedly into the room where they were assembled, and, as if weakened by her emotion, sank down on the sofa beside her mother, and mentioned in a low tone that Mayrose had had an accident. Lady Rosemary had remarked at once that something was amiss, and she was beginning anxiously to interrogate her daughter. But Zellie left her companion to give the details of the affair himself; and Mayrose did so lightly, combating the too warm zeal of Lady Coralmere and Lady Beaujolais, who clasped their hands, advising embrocations, plaister, bed, and everything else that dismayed sympathy could suggest.

"I assure you it was a mere stumble," protested Mayrose for the fourth and fifth time, and with the despair of a man who feels he is becoming ridiculous from over attention.

"But you had better see the doctor, Freddy. These falls are sometimes dangerous if not attended to," said Lord Rosemary moving towards the bell.

"Oh, no, it's nothing, Lady Rosemary," cried Lord Hornette, who was examining the grazed arm; "the skin's not off. I've had a dozen tumbles of the sort myself, and they do one good—teach one to be careful."

He did not speak unfeelingly—only in the tone of a man who does not exaggerate trifles. But as the words left his lips Zellie quivered from head to foot, rose from her seat and ran from the room.

Hornette threw a keen glance at Mayrose.

CHAPTER XI.

A NOBLE SUITOR.

Lord Hornette had not invented gunpowder or even tooth-powder, but for all purposes of self-protection he was shrewd. The greatness of his name, the interests of his fortune, and his own private comfort, were so many bones which his sole occupation here below was to defend, and when anyone stretched out a hand to these bones he showed his teeth. He also showed his teeth when he had set his mind on anything and could not obtain it with reasonable ease—though, be it noted, he asked nothing of nature in the way of a miracle; he only wanted that whatever his birth, property, and particular whims entitled him to, that he should have, and indisputably. Before Mayrose had come to Elmwood it had been pretty generally noticed that Lord Hornette was growing sedulous in his attentions on

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Zellie Carol; and if there had been no conversations on the subject—save, of course, in the servants' hall—it was that Lord Hornette was too great a personage to be hurried in the pace he chose to go. He was the heir of the Bumblebeighs. He would rule over an estate comprising substantial tracts of land in half a dozen counties, and for the present he kept his cool eye on these estates as if they already belonged to him. Nobody would have cared to ruffle Lord Hornette; and this he knew so well that, whenever an obstacle of any sort rose in his way, he wasted no time in endeavouring to make it bend, but walked resolutely up to it and snapped it. This is what he essayed to do in the present case.

Zellie's abrupt flight from the room after the words Lord Hornette had uttered about Mayrose's harmless accident, had been too marked to escape attention. Lady Coralmere and Lady Beaujolais had observed it, and with the rapid intuition peculiar to all ladies in these affairs, had taken in the situation as if a flash of lightning had suddenly come upon them. A minute of most awkward silence followed, for the blood mounted to Mayrose's face as if he were guilty of something. Lady Rosemary cast him a glance not less quick and keen than Hornette's, though it was not like the Earl's, a glance of jealousy and mistrust, but rather one of anxious amazement. She seemed to wonder what it would all mean, and to be too puzzled to fix on any plausible interpretation. Mayrose took the pretext of leaving the room to change his things, and thus put an end to the scene. Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere, with ready tact, thought they should like a walk in the garden, and Lord Hornette, with equal composure, but with a private twitching of the upper lip which his brother Dolly would have detected to mean mischief, fetched his hat to accompany them. This allowed Lady Rosemary to go without delay to her daughter's room.

Country houses are strangely quiet at that period of the afternoon when all visitors are out of doors, and when the housemaids' work is over in the rooms. The passages are deserted; the sun falls with a mellow light into stray nooks where there is no one to enjoy it; the fires in the bed-chambers are burning lazily and unstirred, like fires that will not be wanted for another few hours; and every sound of footfall or voice has an echo unheard in mornings. Before she reached Zellie's door Lady Rosemary caught murmurs which her motherly ear knew to be stifled sobbing, and stealing gently into the room, she saw Zellie standing with one foot on the fender, her arm on the mantelshelf, and her forehead resting on her arm. She must have taken off her hat brusquely, for her hair was unfastened, and fell over her shoulders, and she was holding in her left hand a handkerchief wet with tears. Her little frame shook with the violence of her crying, and when Lady Rosemary, after softly locking the door, approached her, and drew her without a word to her breast, Zellie nestled against her mother and sobbed long and silently.

It was a full hour before Lady Rosemary came down stairs wearing a pale look; and in the room where she had left her work she found Lord Hornette, who had been opportunely relieved of his attendance on the ladies by the return of Lord Rosemary from a magistrates' meeting. He was standing on the hearth-rug pulling at his sandy moustache with his slight fingers, and in his suit of gray tweed and dapper boots looked the image of a well-bred man with whom things have gone crossly.

"I am afraid Zellie has been a little upset by Lord Mayrose's accident," said the Countess apologetically; "but she will be better in the evening."

"I hope it has been nothing serious," answered Lord Hornette, with unfeigned concern.

"No," replied Lady Rosemary, taking up her work and sitting down; "but Zellie has always been impressionable, and the danger of our friend was enough to shake her nerves. They were brought up a great deal together as children."

Here there was a pause.

"I was rather desirous of speaking to you on that subject, Lady Rosemary," said the Earl, in a tone that hesitated a little at starting, but soon became firm. He was still standing on the rug, and drew down his wristbands as if to emphasize his discourse. "The matter is one of such moment to me that I will beg leave to allude to it at once."

"Pray speak, Lord Hornette," answered the Countess, bending her head. She pretended to work, but her heart fluttered, and possibly she much wished at that moment that some one would come in and interrupt the interview. No one did come. The destinies of life are constantly hanging on some one who might come and doesn't."

"I desired to ask your permission and Lord Rosemary's to the taking of a step on which depends my future happiness; in fact, to pay my addresses to Lady Azalea," coughed Lord Hornette, with measured politeness. "I should have done this in any case, dear Lady Rosemary, before leaving Elmwood, but I think it may be franker to speak at once, in order that there may be no concealment on my part as to my sentiments—may I say very respectful and devoted sentiments!—towards your daughter."

"Have you spoken to Azalea?" asked Lady Rosemary, rather by way of answering than because the question was expedient, for she felt in considerable distress as to a reply.

"No; I should not have ventured to do that, Lady Rosemary, before assuring myself that my suit would not be disagreeable to you."

"It could not be disagreeable to me, Lord Hornette." And yet if there be anything in the inflexion of words this reply ran wholly counter to its meaning.

"Nor to Lord Rosemary?"

"Nor to Lord Rosemary, I am certain. We must both feel flattered by your attachment to our daughter." And here again was a negative inflexion which would have struck anyone less sure of himself than Lord Hornette.

"Then may I enquire—and pray forgive the question—whether there is any engagement of long standing between Lady Azalea and Lord Mayrose? or whether the affection between them is of any other but a purely friendly kind?"

He had uttered this question in a deliberate tone, but with a deference which softened the asperity it had in his mind; and Lady Rosemary, whose virtue of virtues was truthfulness, laid down her work, and albeit her distress was growing more and more, looked up at him candidly.

"I believe that Zellie's affection for Lord Mayrose is nothing but that of a sister for a brother, and there is no engagement between them. They were children when they parted, and they can have had no time to form any attachment of a lasting character during the past few days. Nevertheless, Lord Hornette, I would scruple to answer for Zellie's sentiments further than to the extent I have mentioned. I only express a belief, and I may tell you that Zellie has confessed nothing to me. Supposing you wait a little and form your own estimate of Zellie's feelings? She is very young, and you are young too."

"I am of age to know all Lady Azalea's worth," answered the Earl with ready composure; "but may I assume that I have your consent, Lady Rosemary, to pay my addresses?"

"If my consent is all that may be required, you have it, but I could put no constraint on Zellie, nor would her father venture to do, much as it might gladden him to have you for a son-in-law."

"I should be shocked to hear of constraint, dear Lady Rosemary. But if I have your authority the question now lies simply between Mayrose and me; and with your permission I will speak to Mayrose." Saying which he approached, gallantly took the countess's hand and raised it to his lips.

This interview had not lasted ten minutes, and had been conducted with such concise straightforwardness by the Earl that Lady Rosemary had given her answers under compulsion, and was truly dismayed on Lord Hornette's announcing that he was going to look for Mayrose at once. She had a yearning desire to see Mayrose herself, and interrogate him about all that had happened—above all to ascertain with her eyes rather than by actual questions if he reciprocated the love which had been betrayed, though not avowed, by Zellie. If he did not, then she thought that certainly Lord Hornette's offer was a godsend which might nip a one-sided attachment before it had taken lasting root; but if Mayrose had come to her and confessed that he loved Zellie she would have given him her daughter with a gladness all the greater, as this union was one which she had never dared dream of—so recent was May-

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rose's return, and so filial the relationship which he held in her eyes. She had it on her lips to beg Lord Hornette would defer all talk with Mayrose until she had seen the latter herself—an unreasonable request, but one suggested by the utter suddenness of these events, and her consequent bewilderment. The Earl, however, in love matters, as in all other matters, acted promptly, and he left her no time. He walked out of the room with the air of a man who could not dine comfortably unless this affair were set at rest.

CHAPTER XII.

The affair was not set at rest before dinner, but it was advanced a stage. With a quick resolution which gave him all the advantage in a situation where everyone else was more or less flurried, Lord Hornette went up to the rooms which Mayrose occupied in a remote and quiet wing of the house. They were large and cheerful rooms, which the pet of the family had always tenanted as a boy, and they had been fitted up for his return with a loving care by Lady Rosemary and her daughters. In the sitting-room Mayrose had found numerous knick-knacks which had amused him in former days, and some pen-and-ink sketches of himself, done by Zellie, who still retained a talent for good-natured caricatures, hung, signed, and framed, on the walls. The principal room, where he had read during holidays for many a school and college examination, was lighted by two spacious windows commanding a grand view of the park, with its dark masses of foliage, branching rockeries, and ornamental lakes with sloping banks, down which the deer came to slake their thirst; and in clear weather distant Hiveborough could be seen glinting like an opal city under the bright sky. Beside one of the windows stood a writing-table, and on it lay the Blue-book about King Cocoonib, with an annotated map of the whole Cocoa country, where Her Majesty's forces were warring; and if Lord Hornette had lifted this map, he would have come upon the works of Bentham, Comte, and Stuart Mill, for Mayrose studied politics as he had learned mathematics at Cambridge—that is, with the ambition of mastering all the lore of the crooked science. But Lord Hornette was in no mood for lifting up maps. The school friendship between himself and Mayrose dispensed him from ceremony, so he simply knocked at the door and walked in. Mayrose had taken off his hunting things and bathed his arm, and was standing with his back to the fire. He was dressed for dinner, with the exception of his coat, which lay over a chair, and instead of it he wore a Peruvian dressing-gown, striped in white bands blue and yellow, like an awning. His face was serious, and he had been wrapped in deep contemplation when Lord Hornette aroused him.

"I have come for a moment's private talk, old fellow, if I am not intruding," said the Earl, who could not help throwing a glance at that wondrous dressing-gown.

"By no means, sit down and have a smoke," answered Mayrose, wheeling him an arm-chair. Lady Rosemary had stipulated he should smoke in his rooms to his soul's content so long as it did not injure him; and he made rather an unstinting use of the privilege.

"Thanks; they look capital weeds. Branded for you, I suppose?"

"It would be the correct thing to pretend they were; but the truth is when I visited the factory at Havana all the workmen were cut for a day's sport upsetting the Government. I got these in the States."

"A Yankee's cigar is the finest thing in him," remarked the heir of the Bumblebeighs, ensconcing himself in the chair and accepting a lighted match from Mayrose; after which preface he puffed a whiff or two, then began roundly, "I am afraid what I am going to say may not be very welcome to you; but it's no use beating about bushes when one's in earnest. Then you and I are old friends, and I want us to remain so." At which juncture, had the two been foreigners, they would have shaken hands; but being English each nodded.

"It comes to this," proceeded the Earl, flipping the ash off his cigar; "before you arrived I had been paying a sort of court to Lady Azalea Carol, and I had reason to think that my attentions were growing acceptable. Since you came I

have noticed that your position towards Lady Azalea seemed to exceed that of mere friendliness, and an event which has occurred to-day has lent colour to the impression. So my purpose was to inquire of you whether you intended asking Lady Azalea to be your wife. I hope you won't think it unfair if I beg a candid answer."

"This is rather sudden," replied Mayrose, who reddened; but he secretly despised himself for the evasion. There was a touch of haughtiness in his tone, and, although he had not yet had time to see clear into his own mind, he was on the point of giving a short "Yes" to the Earl's question. Why did he not do so, and avert the misunderstandings that followed?

"It is sudden," rejoined Lord Hornette, coolly; "but I stand on this ground—if I have you for a rival I must withdraw. I could make Lady Azalea a duchess, but she is not a girl to weigh this against an affection of longer standing, or—I frankly say so—against other advantages you have over me. In fact, I should have no chance against you." (Lord Hornette did not quite believe this, but he knew the worth of occasional bluntness.) "Now, I ought to add," continued the Earl, as if parenthetically, "that I have requested permission to pay my addresses to Lady Rosemary's daughter, and she has assured me that both the Earl and herself would gladly accept me for a son-in-law."

Here it should have been Lord Hornette's turn to scruple at a statement which was accurate in form but not in substance. What he intended to convey was that Lord and Lady Rosemary had expressed a preference for him over Mayrose; and this, as we know, was not the case. But men in love are not always nice in their strategy, and Lord Hornette was decidedly in love.

"You have spoken to Lady Rosemary?" exclaimed Mayrose, stopping his cigar half way to his lips and pronouncing with sudden hoarseness, "May I ask when?"

"Not half an hour ago."

"And she said that she desired your marriage with Lady Azalea?"

"That was her intimation, but she added that she would place no constraint on her daughter. I had her good will—nothing else."

Mayrose turned pale, as if he had received an inward blow, but after this unexpected crushing statement his answer seemed plainly dictated to him. He had little experience of love, for he had commenced life by distributing his heart in fragments amongst all the pretty faces he met; and it was only since these last few hours that he had begun to guess that if to think of one woman at all hours, to the dimming of every thought, were love, then his feelings towards Zellie might be love. But what could he offer Zellie in comparison with the princely title and huge domains which would be Lord Hornette's? It might well be that Lady Rosemary had projected for her elder daughter an alliance with the heir to the greatest fortune in the county; and what return should he be making for the many indulgent kindnesses shown him if he were to obstruct this match? Surely this would be more than a breach of the tacit trust reposed in his discretion. He had been affectionately received at Elmwood and placed on his old footing, but, as a matter of fact, his position towards the family was wholly changed from what it had formerly been, for Zellie and Violet had become rich heiresses, whilst he was a needy peer, who had never done ought to signalize his name, and whose attentions towards his host's daughters might well deserve to be taxed with presumption and even interestedness. All this passed through his mind with the vividness of something painful and new in the few seconds allowed him to frame his reply, and, when he gave this reply, it was in a winning tone. He felt like a man who has been on the brink of unwittingly doing a dishonorable action. It was not as though he were persuaded that Zellie loved him. Had he been sure of this he might have persevered in despite of all comments; but, in his perplexity, it seemed to him that he must have labored under an hallucination. He could only remember the dialogue he had overheard between Zellie and Hornette in the park, Lady Rosemary's invariable regard for the Earl, the latter's secure influence at Elmwood—all of which things seemed to argue a match long decided upon. So honour and duty prompted Mayrose to renounce without reserve his own unspoken pretensions, and he answered:—

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affection for Azalea Carol is very deep, Hornette, but it does not exceed brotherly affection : and—I have no thought of asking her to be my wife."

"And may I rely that this determination is lasting?" asked Lord Hornette, scanning him searchingly. "I mean, circumstances would not make you alter your mind?"

"No," replied Mayrose with an effort, for the Earl's information had fallen upon him like a shell, scattering all his thoughts. "No, this is too serious a matter to be trifled with ; it would be disingenuous if I gave you but a half assurance."

"Well, then, I have been fortunately mistaken," exclaimed the Earl, whose elation was visible in this that he nearly put the lighted end of his cigar into his mouth. "But now, old man, may I appeal to you to do me a kindness? It will be a kindness to my future wife as well as to me. If you think that Azalea Carol can be happy under my care you will not wish her to be open to any of the misconstruction which might arise from undue familiarity, however innocent, with you. I say this because of society, you know, which is a vixenish thing that bites for the fun of it. Up to this time, thank God, our family have kept out of fang reach ; we are proud that there has not been the breath of a scandal against any woman bearing our name."

"There shall be none so far as I am concerned, Hornette," was Mayrose's quiet promise. "I was going back to town in a few days, but if it can add to your peace of mind I will start to-morrow. Perhaps it will be better if I go in any case."

"No, no, it would be childish to require that," answered Hornette, with a semblance of magnanimity and good fellowship. "Act with Lady Azalea as you would with any other girl affianced to one of your friends ; all I want is to prevent little tattlers like that Lady Coralmere from ever setting you and me against each other. For the rest I only hope your regard for Lady Azalea and me will continue throughout our lives, and if the marriage comes off you will do me sincere pleasure by being my best man."

Lord Hornette, with his slim legs crossed, spoke in a fatuitous tone of confidence as if the marriage were certain ; and he truly deemed it so. There were not half a dozen unengaged women between Lerwick in the Shetlands and the Scilly Isles who would have refused to become mistresses of Hivesworth, and it was inadmissible that Lord Hornette's unlucky star should have brought him to court just one of the six who might possibly decline. He fidgetted in his chair with the restlessness of a cleverly-won triumph, and only the decent civility we owe to a man who has relieved us of a big load prevented him from leaving the room before he had finished his cigar. He employed the embarrassing interval in reverting to Mayrose's accident, and was talkatively surprised Mayrose had not embrocated his arm with arnica, as it was always prudent to do so in such cases ; he would send him a phial of the tincture which he had in his travelling medicine-chest ; and, this said, his cigar was so far consumed—he began to think the Americans smoked too much at one go—that he could leave Mayrose to himself. He hastened to give his valet the arnica, for he was punctual in his promises, and then hurried down stairs to apprise Lady Rosemary that he had no rival in the field, and to ask the more formal sanction of Lord Rosemary to his love-making, in order that, according to his programme, things should be in a smooth way before dinner. Small Lord Hornette was a man who struck, not once, when the iron was hot, but twenty and fifty times. As a friend he would have been invaluable, and as an enemy worse than a hair-shirt, for he took no rest till he had effected what he desired or been unequivocally beaten in the attempt. Though he knew nothing of soldiering no man could have better commanded an army in straits ; and had he been locked up Metz or Paris his besiegers would have found little time to go clock-hunting or to chant *Te Deums*.

He left Mayrose very melancholy. The man who sees the sun obscured by a cloud just after it has dawned must feel what Mayrose felt. He would not have believed that so many emotions could have ploughed his heart within a few hours and resulted in an utter disenchantment of everything. Providence crowds into certain days the trial and experience of whole years. Mayrose had never known unhappiness before, and he would have been at a loss to account for his unhappi-

ness now, for before Hornette had come in, he had no settled project of asking Zellie to be his wife. He had not been able even thoroughly to convince himself that his sentiments towards her were love, and therefore they visibly stood towards each other as before—as brother and sister. But his inner heart rejected this sophistry. He went and sat down at his writing-table, resting his elbows on it, and gazing into the park, through which Violet, Lord Beaujolais, and Dolly Drone presently ambled abreast, returning from the best run of the season. They seemed not to have heard of his accident, for he could see they were laughing, and Violet was stroking the mane of her mare, as if to praise her for gallant exploits. Bino, who came in with the arnica, found his master tracing listless circles on his blotting-book, and lost in a frowning reverie.

"Lord Hornette, he sent me with this, milord, and he call dat medicine; but I no believe in medicine smell as strong as this. If I drink this I be dead drunk. Yes, sir."

"Put it in the dressing-room, Bino."

Bino, going to comply, held the phial at arm's length. He wore a martial look, did Mr. Bino, for like a Maltese Caesar he had come, seen, and conquered the servants' hall at Elmwood. None of the feminine domestics had remained insensible to his tales of battles in which he had never participated, of hand-to-hand struggles with foreign policemen which he had never fought; and two ladies' maids, a scullery-maid, and an under-cook had furtively sighed in giving him pieces of their cap-strings and wisps of their hair enough to make a watch-guard. As for the valets, footmen, and others, they were divided as to whether Bino was a murderous rascal or a fool; for the Italian never failed to spice his narratives with dramatic action, and his account of how he had plunged a knife haft-deep into the throats of three Papal gendarmes one after another had one day stripped the chief butler of all appetite for his dinner. For all this, Bino's genius for concertina-playing, omelettes making, ballad-singing (in all tongues and out of tune), and card-conjuring had acquired him a reputation below stairs which nothing could shake, and all the grooms called him Count—let it be hoped unironically.

"You hurt by dat fall, sir?" said Bino, returning, and throwing a questioning look at his master. "If I were you I no give myself de trouble to break my neck jumping after a fox. If I want a fox I take a gun and shoot him. Yes, sir."

"I'm all right, Bino. What time is it?"

"Just upon first dinner-gong," answered Bino, drawing a gold watch which Mayrose had given him, and on which he himself had caused a coronet to be engraved. "You take a glass of bitters now, sir; he do you good. There goes dat gong."

The gong's copper voice was bellowing in the hall, and so Mayrose had an hour before he need face Lady Rosemary and Zellie again. Truth to say, he shirked this meeting, for it was cruel pain to him to think that Lady Rosemary might all the while be suspecting him of having acted unhandsomely. On the other hand he was just in such a temper that if Lady Rosemary had greeted him with her accustomed gentleness he would have felt angry towards her in his mortification that she should have valued him less than a man like Lord Hornette. "For," said his vanity, "what confidence can she have in my ever attaining fame and power if she accounts me of so little importance beside this unpleasant Earl? What can be the sincerity of her affection if she rejects me so contemptuously as a son-in-law?" If he could have known that the Countess had been fretting to see him ever since she had spoken with Zellie, and that one of the sharpest pangs she had ever experienced had been on hearing from Lord Hornette's exulting lips that Mayrose had no thoughts of wooing her daughter! But where would be the errors and heart-burnings of life if we were not for ever playing at cross purposes? The minutes sped all too fast, but Mayrose waited for the stroke of the dinner hour before he descended to the drawing room, where the other guests were already mustered every one. It was to be another great dinner of county notables, and the number of them was like a swarm exceeding black, befouled, and hungry. Amid this throng Mayrose looked and quickly caught sight of Zellie. Her dress was never the same at two of these dinners, and this evening she was in white silk ornamented

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with scarlet geraniums. These dazzling flowers shone on her glistening skirts, in her bosom, in the golden coils of her hair, and they helped to set off the pallor of her complexion—a pallor that was being generally attributed to a slight headache.

Mayrose's entry created a sort of sensation. Though Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere for discreet reasons remained mute as to his accident, Violet, who had now heard of the accident, but knew nothing of all that had occurred since the ride home, was not so reticent, and the whole story of the leap, the fall, and the bruised arm had to be gone through again, amidst a chorus of sympathy. It is singular how the mishaps of some men evoke universal condolence, while the graver calamities of others are treated as matters for jesting. Unhappy Mr. Buttercombe, who was present that evening, had been pitched on his head, on his knees, on his back, till his frame had become seamed like a melon; but these catastrophes had passed into standing jokes relished everywhere in the county, even by Mr. Buttercombe himself. Mayrose was naturally averse to being wailed over as a fragile piece of glass, but happily he was asked to take in Lady Coralmere to dinner; and the lively prattle of this lady served to set his nerves in order. The wines also revived him; and studying to keep his eyes from glancing where Zellie sat, he reached the middle and end of dinner in chit-chat, absorbing enough, about some new opera, the variations in ladies' fashions, and about Mr. Paradyse, the Premier, and arch-rival of Mr. Paramount. After dinner Violet sang the "Mandolinata" serenade, and a gentleman who was known in Hiveshire for his famous imitations of popular actors got hold of a broken hat and gave screaming versions of Mr. Buckstone and Mr. Toole; so this part of the evening went off well also. But Mayrose dreaded that half-hour round the fire, when all the guests would be gone, and when but the few visitors staying in the house would be closing the day with a little intimate talk. He knew not what countenance he should keep when he found himself close to Zellie, and when he should be obliged to shake hands with her and say good-night. It must have been an intuitive sense which warned him of the crowning misery that was reserved for him in that half-hour; for as soon as Lord Rosemary had returned from escorting the last county lady to the door, he laid his hand on Mayrose's shoulder, and said brightly—

"So, Freddy, you are irresistible everywhere, and you have been winning the heart of Miss Pennywoddle."

Mayrose felt himself reddened to the roots of his hair.

"Miss Pennywoddle, the heiress?" put in Lord Hornette, with perhaps not unintentional stress.

"Yes, a true heiress, and all England must hear of the conquest if Sir Ham repeats it everywhere, as he did to-day at our magistrates' meeting," proceeded Lord Rosemary, with the graceful jocularly of a man who thinks he is doing no harm. "It seems Freddy saw her at Springfield the other day, and gave her a bouquet of camelias."

Mayrose was sick at heart. He dared not glance at Zellie, but he looked up towards Lady Rosemary, and their eyes met. He would have died on the spot to escape that look.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GENERAL ELECTION.

Everybody is aware that Parliament was suddenly dissolved that year within a few days appointed for the opening of the Session; and politicians found themselves plunged into electoral contests like men beneath whom a bank gives way, and who take headers with their clothes on. Two stirring manifestos from Mr. Paramount and Mr. Paradyse pealed like bugles over the land. The telegraphic wires darting their brisk feelers over the Continent pulled home by the ears, as it were, scores of startled M.P.'s who had been wintering placidly under Southern skies; the deadwalls and hoardings of Great Britain became blue, red, yellow, and rainbow-like, with addresses; and from all points of the compass—from the hullabaloo wilds of Ireland to the Tory corn-lands of English shires—there was a rush of candidates as

of many herds of Bashan bulls let loose, and a thunderous bellowing of "Vote for us!" "Plump for us!" Among the foremost of these who thus bellowed were Lord Hornette and Dolly Drone, who, although as secure in their seats as two spikes on posts, bestirred themselves, and signed gallant appeals to their constituents. Of course this surprise broke up the party at Elmwood, for the brothers started off to show themselves to their electors; Lord Rosemary went away to use his influence for a nominee on one of his estates in the north, and Mayrose returned to Springfield.

He had no wish to go there. The news of the dissolution arrived within a few hours of the events recorded in the last chapter, and if he could have had his way he would have remained at Elmwood alone with Lady Rosemary and her daughters, and have set at rest the misunderstanding which had so unaccountably grown up between him, Zellie, and the Countess. But fidelity to his engagement with Lord Hornette prevented him from doing this. So he left Elmwood, pained to the heart that Lady Rosemary should not ask him to stop, and feeling that he was somehow lowered in her estimation without having done anything to deserve this.

Passing through Hiveborough he saw some workmen busy with pots and brushes, painting in letters a foot long, "Vote for Pennywoddle!" and this sight moved the wrath within him. He was determined to shake off this accursed city man, who was the cause of the last cruel pang he had suffered in the drawing-room at Elmwood, when the cannelia incident had been mentioned. Sir Ham was stalking him about without shame or decency, and had become loathsome to his very thoughts. He noticed that there were no addresses from the Knight yet out, but only these painted screams for votes, and he concluded that Sir Ham was waiting until he had seen him before launching a proclamation of his views, the which would doubtless tally syllable for syllable with whatever Mayrose chose to dictate. In this he was not wrong, but Sir Ham thinking him at Elmwood, had written thither craving an interview; and so Mayrose received the Knight's visit a day later than he expected. He employed the interval in preparing a set reply, in which, whilst showing all the regard due to Sir Ham's recent domestic affliction, he would inform him that he saw no reason for displacing Mr. Quintus Dexter. The better to steel himself for this declaration, he tried to ascertain all he could about the sitting member, applying to one Mr. Grindle, a hosier, church warden, town councillor, and an active character in the borough.

Mr. Quintus Dexter, as sketched by Mr. Grindle, was a smart young man from "Oxford College." He had come to contest Hiveborough soon after taking his degree, and having no money or connections, so far as men were aware, it was presumed that he had simply aimed at attracting public notice, without cherishing a hope of winning the seat. But it chanced that a day or two before the contest his rival was stricken with paralysis, and Mr. Dexter had by that time so ingratiated himself with everybody, even with his opponents, that these latter consented to let him "walk over"—doing this with the more courtesy as they were unable to light upon another candidate upon so short a notice. This is how Mr. Dexter had been returned for Hiveborough. Mayrose was abroad when it all happened, but if he desired a sample of Mr. Dexter's opinions, Mr. Grindle was in a position to show him that honourable gentleman's first address. The interview had for its scene Mr. Grindle's shop parlour, and the hosier unlocked a cupboard, on the shelves of which lay neatly docketed the addresses of every candidate who had canvassed Hiveborough since Mr. Grindle's head had risen above his father's counter. He took a humorous interest in politics, did Mr. Grindle, and had christened this cupboard his "pawnbroker's shop," because it was so full of unredeemed pledges.

"Now, my lod," said he, wetting his thumb to turn over an old copy of the *Hiveborough Bee*, "now this is what I call a safe address; there's no bumps in it."

There were no bumps. Mr. Dexter's views were of the elastic sort, which stretch any length and any way. They would never compromise their owner, who under cover of them might advance or recede, manœuvre from Mr. Speaker's right to his left, and yet aver he was always consistent with his original programme. It requires a talent eminently English to indite these neutral creeds in which every affirmative stands enshrouded in a mist of saving clauses thick and bewildering as

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opium smoke. For Mayrose's purpose the address did well, for there was not an opinion in the political catalogue which Mr. Dexter could be said either to endorse or reject, and therefore if Sir Ham spoke of his principles it would be easy to reply that Mr. Dexter had principles, too, and universal ones.

"Ain't it clever, my lod!" chuckled Mr. Grindle, unstringing several card-board boxes, for Mayrose had ostensibly come to buy pocket-handkerchiefs, and his talk about Mr. Dexter was a thing by the way. "These are half a guinea apiece, the finest cambric—one would wish to have a cold in the head to use such handkerchiefs. As for Mr. Dexter he's a deep young gentleman, my lod. We were six of us trying to find out his Church views, but he went three times to church in one Sunday—morning to the parish, to the Baptist's in the afternoon, and wound up the day with the Jumpers."

"You can send me a dozen of these, Mr. Grindle. At all events Mr. Dexter seems to be a keen Protestant."

"Well, my lord, we haven't a Catholic church here," said Mr. Grindle; and this was a fact, for although a Jesuit Father had once taken lodgings in the town, with a view to proselytising, he had thought it prudent to decamp on finding his letter-box filled with cabbage leaves every morning, and on being held publicly responsible for a hail-storm, the burning of a hay-rick, and an epidemic of measles which had broken out soon after his appearance. "We haven't a Popish church, my lod, and it's my opinion one would have to get up very early in the morning to find out what's Mr. Dexter's real place of worship. These here are silk handkerchiefs, my lod, with coloured borders, light blue, scarlet, and orange. Seven guineas and a half the dozen, and just the things for the hunting-field. Nothing's so neat to my mind as a showy handkerchief in the breast-pocket of a red coat."

"I think I prefer plain silk, Mr. Grindle. But now, I suppose, you are going to return Mr. Dexter again?"

"Well, my lod, there's Sir Ham Pennywoddle coming forrard;" and at this gilded name Mr. Grindle's eyes circled into admiring focuses. This hosier was a busy tradesman, with a pink face and a store of facetiousness, who had made of his mind three compartments labelled "Commerce," "Church," and "Politics," and from each of the compartments he could draw, as occasion demanded, shrewd maxims for the guidance of himself and neighbours—but especially of the neighbours. Dropping an orange-hemmed handkerchief, he now said, with his head jerked on one side like a cautious bird's, "Mr. Dexter hasn't issued no address yet, for he was in Paris and has been telegraphed for; but Sir Ham is a warm man who spends much money in Hiveborough, and we made sure he would have your lordship's support."

"I have no vote, Mr. Grindle."

"That's true; but many of us would be guided by your choice, my lord. I would for one. As there ain't any bribery to be expected, and as the Ballot'll keep Sir Ham from knowing who voted for him and who didn't, we can afford to go by our consciences—which will be something new."

"Since you put it in that light, I may tell you that if I had a vote I should give it to Mr. Dexter."

"Whew!" deferentially ejaculated Mr. Grindle, with a stare of surprise, as if there must be a mystery under all this. "Well, my lod, when I get repeating that in the town it'll make a great difference to Sir Ham's chances, though of course he'll get as many *promises* as he chooses to ask for. We never looked upon Mr. Dexter as a permanency; but since you like him——"

"I see no reason for unseating him, that's all," interrupted Mayrose.

"It amounts to the same in the end, my lod," remarked Mr. Grindle, sapiently, and then added with a gush, "but what a pity it is your lodship can't come forrard? Why don't they let peers choose between the two Houses—the younger ones to sit in the Lower House and the old ones in the Upper?"

Why, indeed? As Mayrose left Mr. Grindle's shop, glorious with its trophies of striped socks, pin-scarfs, and huckaback towels, he deplored with a sharp regret that he could take no part in the coming contest. It was market-day in Hiveborough; the pavements in the main thoroughfare were fenced round with stakes

and chains to prevent the beeves and calves from getting on the flags and butting the townsfolk into the shop windows; and the farmers and drovers who slouched about haggling, or hung round the steps of the Springfield Arms were all talking more or less about the elections. When Mayrose passed they nudged each other, stood aside, and respectfully lifted their hats; and near the inn door he had a sort of ovation—for three bulky farmers were coming out, sleek in their velveteens, and with their lips merry from brandy-and-water, and one of them apostrophised him, shouting:—"We want a true blue candidate in Hiveborough, my lord—one who'll take off the malt tax!" And as Mayrose nodded with a smile, the farmers gave him a cheer which was taken up, amid great commotion from the cattle, and followed him for a hundred yards. His popularity in Hiveborough—the heritage he derived from centuries of generosity, lordliness, and goodness on the part of his fathers—was a thing which nothing could shake, and if he had been a candidate in this town he would have been elected with acclamation. This he knew, and it was miserable to him that it could not be, for, after all, what was his peerage worth? The privilege of a peer consists in voting on certain occasions solemnly against his convictions. If he declines doing this he is warned by the piercing shrieks of Liberal newspapers or by mob-stones thrown through his window that he is putting his order in peril. Mayrose saw nothing worth conserving in the privilege of his order to do as journalists command them, and a suppression or radical reform of the House of Lords had no terrors to his mind. No one could strip him of the name he bore, or of the memories that made that name noble; but if the House of Lords were transformed into a Senate of Members, elected on the American plan by county boards, there might be more hope for Conservative—that is, anti-Democratic—Government than under the present system. The ex-peers of wealth and intellect would get returned to the House of Commons, or, if elected to the Senate, they would belong to an assembly whose powers would be no sham. England might be ruled again, then, with a grim hand; throw off that incubus of commercial pusillanimity which weighs on the body politic like so much weakening fat, and show a bold front both to enemies abroad and to crack-brained demolishers at home. If this charge was ever mooted Mayrose secretly pledged himself to support it with all his might, even though he seemed thereby to act against his party; for Conservatism is not the sustaining of institutions which have become virtually obsolete, but the vigorous withstanding of government by demagogues—that is, government by unscrupulous sophists truckling to the ignorance, vanity, and imbecility of the masses.

The natural reaction consequent upon Mayrose's rather excited musings left him melancholy when he returned to Springfield. He pondered again about Zellie and Elmwood, and after dinner, being alone in his study, wrote the following letter, which brought him relief:—

MY DEAR LADY ROSEMARY,—I do not care to conceal any of my thoughts from you, and I am depressed from fearing that something has occurred to mar the confidence you had in me. I explained, after Lord Rosemary's joke about Miss Pennywoddle, under what circumstances I had met irrepressible Sir Ham and his family; but I felt that I stammered and stumbled in speaking, for after the conversation I had held with yourself about Miss Pennywoddle, I was conscious of standing in an absurd light. There are moments when circumstances conspire to make a man look inevitably foolish. I wish you could understand my real impressions about these Pennywoddles. I have been doing my best to-day to prevent Sir Ham's election in Hiveborough, and I would give a year's income to hear of Miss Mary's being safely married to someone who would remove her hundreds of miles from my conservatories and my peace of mind. I take this occasion of saying that Lord Hornette came to me the day before I left Elmwood and made me acquainted with the sanction he had obtained from you for paying his addresses to Zellie. At the same time—impelled, I suppose, by some suspiciousness peculiar to lovers—he asked me whether I myself stood in the way of his courtship? Need I declare that I was pained at the mere idea that I could be suspected of frustrating any project on which you had set your heart?—and now I add my best, most confident hopes that Zellie may be rendered happy by this match.

Please write, dear Lady Rosemary, for your letters are balm to me, and believe me,

Most faithfully yours,

MAYROSE.

This letter was still lying on Mayrose's table on the next morning, for he intended sending it to Elmwood by a groom with some more of those camelias and some hot-house fruit. But at breakfast he read the papers, and they brought him a piece of news which by and bye obliged him to throw his letter into the fire, and write another very different in one respect—that which treated of Sir Ham's candidature. The London papers, in giving the list of candidates, mentioned that the struggle would lie between Mr. Dexter and Sir Ham Pennywoddle; but the *Hiveborough Bee*, in its leading column, printed this announcement in large type:—

"At the moment of going to press we learn from authentic sources that Mr. Dexter retires from the contest in our borough, and that Mr. Howle, a candidate of the Downtrodden Proletary Association, is coming from London to oppose Sir Ham Pennywoddle. Mr. Howle's address will be issued to day, and it will embody the views of the Republican Faction."

Whilst Mayrose was brooding in vexation over this unexpected intelligence, the front door bell was rung, and a footman entered to announce Mr. Grindle, who had been driven over from Hiveborough in a dog-cart by the ostler of the Springfield Arms. He was flushed like a popular ambassador on a special mission, and bowed himself into the peer's presence with profuse apologies, holding his hat behind him as if he were ashamed of it, though it was a new one.

"My lod, I took the liberty of coming over about the election."

"Sit down, Mr. Grindle," said Mayrose who had left the breakfast-room and was standing in the study; "I am sorry to see Mr. Dexter retires."

"Yes my lod, and that alters the complexion of everybody" (he meant of everything). "Knowing your lodship never wants to cloak his mind, I just spoke last night at our club about your sayings as to Sir Ham, and a great many of us agreed not to vote for him."

"You did quite right to repeat my words," answered Mayrose, decidedly. "I am for open voting, and, above all, for plain-speaking in politics."

"But now, my lod, I thought I'd just make free to question you about Mr. Howle. He's not the kind of man as would suit anybody who has saved a few pounds and wants to keep them. If you had a vote, my lod, would you give it to this Mr. Howle?"

Mayrose hesitated an instant. He was on the point of saying in his irritation that he should vote for nobody; but honesty checked him from giving way to this bit of spite. Mr. Howle of the Proletary Association was one of those persons whom politicians cannot afford to ignore, but must combat. So Mayrose reluctantly advised Mr. Grindle and his friends to vote for Mr. Pennywoddle. But to himself he added, with a gesture of impatience—

"There seems to be a fatality in it. That man will come now and swear he owes his election to me."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. QUINTUS DEXTER.

Nothing was more likely than that Sir Ham would do this, and indeed before the day was out the Warden of the Sausage-makers was certifying to all who chose to listen to him, that he had Lord Mayrose at his back. This with a view to scaring off any ulterior candidates, who might spring up beside the down-trodden Mr. Howle. But at the moment when Mayrose was uttering the words, Sir Ham himself was unconscious of the good luck that had befallen him, for, busy reading the London papers, he had omitted to look at the *Hiveborough Bee*, which was not at ordinary times a highly-informed or very seductive publication. On coming down to breakfast and to the family prayers, which piously preceded this repast, Sir Ham had been surprised and not a little frightened, at finding no reply to the letter

he had forwarded to Mayrose at Elmwood. During prayers, at which all the servants attended, kneeling and offering two rows of well-favoured backs to Sir Ham's gaze, the knight's agitation caused him to skip a few lines of the ritual and to jumble others unintelligibly with one another—as who should say, religious processions in a hurry and jostling each other at a church door; and at breakfast, between mouthfuls of fried sole, he consulted his wife and daughter flurriedly about the wisdom of driving over to Springfield at any hazard, and if the peer were not there of pushing on to Elmwood. Lady Pennywoddle, who harboured worshipful ideas of the Lord of Springfield since the episode in the camelia-house, opined that if there were no answer it could only be due to a miscarriage; Mary Pennywoddle poured out the tea in silence and opined nothing. Sir Ham, however, was destined to hear of his rival's retirement in the most unforeseen and startling manner from that rival's own lips. It was after breakfast in the morning room, whither the knight and his family habitually adjourned, that the surprise occurred. Even the black-clad footman of Penny looked scared when he brought in the salver with a card inscribed:—"Mr. Quintus Dexter—Reform Club—Upper Temple."

"Mr. Dexter!" gasped Sir Ham, puncturing his tongue with a toothpick, and blood flowed in a purple torrent to his face. Both Lady Pennywoddle and Mary, who were sewing violet to deck the sausage-maker on the day of battle (violet is a neutral tint) looked up astonished, for Mr. Dexter had, of course, been described to them as an ill-conditioned, bloodythirsty foe.

"Show him in," stuttered Sir Ham, in a throttling tone; and too much stunned to say another word or to assume the aspect of bellicose dignity which should have well graced him on such an occasion, he trotted behind his footman's heels into the room where Mr. Dexter was awaiting him. It was a cozily-warmed visiting-room, with peerages and knightages on the table, and Mr. Dexter sat by the fire in new dogskin gloves and with a gold-headed stick of rhinoceros horn. He was a young man of twenty-five, neither tall nor short, light nor dark, handsome nor ill-favoured. There was no salient point in him which you could lay hold of. The London pavements exhibit thousands of such well-dressed, unruffled, un conspicuous persons as he every day; and when he spoke there was nothing remarkable in his language or in his voice. He was, in truth, an unremarkable person all over, and it had needed a quick observer and physiognomist like Mayrose to judge from Mr. Dexter's photograph, shown him in Mr. Touzle's shop, that the ex-member for Hiveborough had energetic features. Ordinary beholders would have thought his countenance well fitted for a satisfied curate's, an ambitionless barrister's, or a clerk's well content to dot and carry one on a high stool for moderate wages. On Sir Ham's appearing, Mr. Dexter advanced and began simply:—

"Sir Ham, I deemed it an act of necessary courtesy to call personally on you to say that I retire from the contest in Hiveborough."

Sir Ham came to anchor on a piece of carpet representing a yellow tulip on a blue ground, and his nostrils blew out as if he were going to snort.

"You are not going to try for the seat?" he muttered, dribbling out his words with a blank amazement, heightened by the uneasy suspiciousness of something not visible, but likely to explode by-and-bye.

Mr. Dexter had reseated himself, on a dumb request of the knight's. "No. You have county influence, and I have none; you will probably be supported by Lord Mayrose, and I shall have no support, for I was only elected last time by a hazard. A contest would be a useless expense to me, and a needless annoyance to you. That is my position."

"You are very good," grunted Sir Ham, not knowing what he said, but sinking into a chair, and drawing his handkerchief to mop his hot features. He required a minute or two to rally his scattered thoughts, and the better to do so, ended by spreading out his handkerchief across his knees, as if he particularly wanted Mr. Dexter to admire the pattern. Suddenly he paused in the act of mutely demonstrating that all the patterns were alike, and inquired in a guarded tone, "Then am I to understand that the seat's safely mine?"

"So far as I am concerned you have no opponent. I believe a Mr. Howle is coming forward, but he can be of no danger."

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"Ah, there's a Mr. Howle!" ejaculated Sir Ham, with a wide-awake look in his eyes, as if here were the something he had been sniffing. "Who's Mr. Howle, air?" Sir Ham often addressed people as "air" in heated moments.

"Nothing to speak of," smiled Mr. Dexter; "but have you not seen the paper? I think I have a copy with me." And setting his hat on the floor he drew a *Hiveborough Bee* from his pocket and laid the sensational paragraph of the morning before Sir Ham. To have beheld Sir Ham clutch this periodical, and bring his salient eyes to bear on it as if they were going to jump through the paper, would have been a refreshing sight to any man. It took him but slight reading to see that Mr. Howle would be a harmless antagonist; but he perused the paragraph a dozen times for his own satisfaction's sake before he returned Mr. Dexter his paper; then he smoothed his thighs with both hands, and delivered himself anew—

"It seems to me, Mr. Dexter, you're behaving handsome."

"Say sensibly," laughed this gentleman, with a deprecating gesture of his left dog-skin; but if Mayrose had been present he would perhaps have noticed in Mr. Dexter's eyes a humorous twinkle of satisfaction.

"I call it handsome," doggedly repeated Sir Ham, as if his faculties were gradually awakening to the recondite aspects of things; "it's handsome, Muster Dexter, for there's no saying but you might have beaten me."

"I do not think so; but even if I had, I tell you frankly my victory might have embarrassed me. I came forward originally rather for amusement and for exercise in public speaking; but the House of Commons is too expensive for a man with no income. In ten years' time, if I pick up practice enough at the Bar, I may have a try again."

"I heerd you were at the Bar, Mr. Dexter." And Sir Ham took stock of his visitor, beginning with his boots, which were of polished leather, and going up to his hair, which was parted down the middle—hair neither lank nor curly, but clever hair, keeping its place as it had been brushed.

"Yes; and it's a current impression that a young barrister who gets into Parliament is much run after by briefs. But the briefs would not run after me, as I have taken two years to discover."

"If I ever have a suit at law—which I shan't, for I don't like lawyer's business—you shall defend me—I mean, speak for me," exclaimed Sir Ham, with cautious but resolute emphasis. "It strikes me you're a sharp young man, though it mayn't be manners to say so."

Mr. Dexter rose laughing.

"Candidates' moments are always valuable at election time, Sir Ham. I called in order that there might be no doubt as to my unequivocal withdrawal, and I have only to add now that if I can be of any service to you in addressing the electors in your behalf, you will find me ready. I have put up at the Springfield Arms."

"You'll speak to the electors for me! Stop!" cried Sir Ham, whose surprise now took the form of apoplectic excitement. "Dang me, Muster Dexter, if you ain't acting like a gentleman! If you are going to speak for me to the electors you'll come and stop at my house, not at the inn. Blow it! My servants shall go over and fetch your luggage. Don't say no."

"This is too kind, Sir Ham. It would be a great intrusion in me."

"Intrusion! who says so? It'll do me good. Those electors will know we've become fast friends; and it'll do you good, for we'll take care o' you and make your stay pleasant. Come along and see my wife and daughter."

Again it might have struck a physiognomist that Mr. Dexter yielded rather promptly to Sir Ham's proposition. Beyond his first few words of protest he adduced no objection, and it was with a demeanour eminently cool and a step quite ready that he followed Sir Ham into the morning room, and suffered himself to be presented to the ladies.

"Sir Ham is embarrassing me with his great kindness," he said urbanely to Lady Pennywaddle.

"Kindness! Why he's just given me his seat in Parliament, and he's going to make speeches for me!" yelled rather than answered honest Sir Ham, and

straddling towards the bell he pulled it. "My dears, I shall go into Hiveborough now to see about the printing of them addresses, and call on Lord Mayrose before doing so just to see which address he likes best. Muster Dexter, will you stay with the ladies till I come back? We'll have your luggage over in the afternoon."

"I will stay with pleasure, but I am afraid I shall be terribly in Lady Pennywoddle's way," replied Mr. Dexter, appealing to the elder lady, but glancing at Mary Pennywoddle.

"Don't talk about being in the way, Mr. Dexter," said Lady Pennywoddle, with matronly good nature. "We'll have the blue room got ready—eh, Ham, dear?"

"We are always pleased to see papa's friends," added Mary Pennywoddle, candidly.

The fact is Mr. Dexter's arrival had come upon them, as it had on Sir Ham, like a lump of gold on the head, and they did not know what to make of it, or what to say.

CHAPTER XV.

M. P. FOR HIVEBOROUGH.

Mr. Quintus Dexter remained at Penny until Sir Ham Pennywoddle had been duly elected to serve Hiveborough in Parliament. It surprised everyone to see this puzzling young man retire from the contest and speak in Sir Ham's favour at a public meeting convoked in the Town Hall—the more so as his speech was singularly frank and good-humoured. Nobody went away with the impression that Mr. Dexter had been paid a sum of money for retiring, as is generally the notion when a poor candidate suddenly makes way for a rich one; and no one accused Mr. Dexter of having treated the borough unceremoniously. The electors accepted Mr. Dexter's own version of his case. He had thought he could attend to his profession and to Parliament at the same time, but found he could not. At some future epoch, when he had earned a silk gown and got more briefs on his hands than he could possibly deal with—(here he laughed, and all the audience laughed, cheering him)—then he might court Parliament again as a relaxation; meanwhile he thanked his ex-constituents for teaching him what most other people had known before—that one man cannot drive two coaches together.

The electors accepted this explanation, and yet they were surprised; for though it was a fact that Mr. Dexter had been wonderfully in earnest about his Parliamentary duties—never missing a sitting, and speaking as often as the "Whips" would let Mr. Speaker "catch his eye"—nevertheless connoisseurs like Mr. Grindle gave him credit for being able to drive any number of coaches together. As for Mayrose, on reading Mr. Dexter's speech in the *Hiveborough Bee*, he murmured, "This is a knowing fellow; we have not heard the last of him."

Personally, he heard of Mr. Dexter very soon, for this gentleman had learned from so many mouths that Lord Mayrose had intended supporting his candidature, that he went as an act of grace to thank the owner of Springfield, and to give him a private statement of his reasons for retiring.

"I am sorry you have withdrawn, Mr. Dexter," said Mayrose, candidly. "When Sir Ham Pennywoddle came to me the other day I felt bound to tell him that if you had stood against him you should have had all the assistance I could give you."

"I am very much flattered and touched by this mark of your confidence, my lord."

"Well, we are both 'Varsity men," answered Mayrose. "I do not quite understand your politics, but an Oxford first-class man would have done more honour to our town, and have rendered better service to the country, than an enriched tradesman."

"At all events, Sir Ham's election will count as a gain to Mr. Paramount, for I voted as an Independent."

"I am not enough of a party man to appreciate this blessing, Mr. Dexter,"

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said Mayrose drily. "Sir Ham may vote well enough; but should you ever wish to contest Hiveborough again you may rely on my help—that is, unless a candidate of equal ability with yourself came forward, in which case I should of course give the preference to the man nearest my own color."

This promise placed Mr. Dexter on a very strong footing at Penny, for he contrived in a jocular manner to make Sir Ham acquainted with it; and the knight, feeling that he should hold his seat only on sufferance, as it were, and so long as it pleased Mr. Dexter, naturally laid himself out to secure this young barrister's friendship. He would have taken kindly to him in any case, for Oxford men did not abound on Lady Pennywoddle's visiting-list, and such few of them as Sir Ham knew did not treat him with that comforting deference shown by Mr. Dexter. The ex-M.P. raised Sir Ham in his own esteem. Instead of speaking to him in that queer jingle of persiflage which the Warden of the Sausage-Makers had often noticed in clever young men from the Universities, and which made him feel vaguely that he was being mystified by them, Mr. Dexter listened to him respectfully as to a great oracle of the financial world. He assented to all the city magnate's remarks; complimented him sensibly on the benefits conferred by the wholesale utilization of those oyster-shells; and, withal, introduced his own knowledge of men and things with tact enough to remind Sir Ham constantly that it was no mere stripling fresh from college who thus burned incense under his nose, but a rising man who had enjoyed the best education which England could afford, who had sat in Parliament, frayed with statesmen, and who, either as a politician or an advocate, would certainly end by leaving his mark on society. The upshot of all this was that in the course of a few days Sir Ham waxed confidential with his guest, went into statistics about his oyster-shells, and began to take a budding interest in a scheme of Mr. Dexter's for launching a new review or newspaper. With men like Sir Ham there is no medium between the extreme of suspiciousness and that of blind trust. The sausage maker had passed all his life thinking that men wanted to over-reach him, and he had so studiously put himself on his guard, that—without meaning it, let us be sure—he had generally over-reached his neighbours. This is what the world calls experience. But the experience which makes one see in every human being a possible rogue melts at contact with a man who asks for nothing, renders an unhopd-for service, and tickles the innermost fibres of one's heart with flattery the most skilful and repeated. Perhaps, too, a man who has thriven on mistrustfulness, got all that is to be had out of it—that is money, for it yields little else—grows tired of it in the end, as we do of many things on which we have fattened; and then he pines to lavish the pent-up store of his confidence on somebody, and the first trustable person who comes in his way has the luck of a man who passes under an overlaiden tree at the time of windfall. This had been Mr. Dexter's lot. There are particular men whom Providence singles out for windfalls; and Mr. Dexter would pleasantly boast that he had always chanced at college on facile examiners, in politics upon open-armed constituents, and in such raffles and lotteries as he had occasionally subscribed to upon none but good tickets. Now Sir Ham warmed to him, and the knight's confiding regard attained its full expansion on the evening when seven hundred and three electors of Hiveborough declared that Pennywoddle was the man who should sit for them at Westminster.

The election was a very tame affair, for that objectionable Mr. Howle only mustered twenty votes. There was no carousing or horse play; no cats were thrown, no brass bands or banners patrolled the streets. The electors skunked into a labyrinth of wooden boxes and dropped their votes through a slit as if they were ashamed of them; then slunk out, looking sheepish, like men who would have no defence to offer if anyone taxed them with having voted against their troth. At four o'clock the poll closed, and a dozen flustered policemen came up in batches of four from three different parts of the borough carrying the ballot-boxes to the Town Hall. There the mayor having counted the papers and turned them back upwards, with a cluster of citizens around to watch him and see that he put none of them in his pocket, made an addition sum on a piece of paper; and a returning-officer having verified the sum by counting all the papers over again, as if he profoundly distrusted both the mayor's arithmetic and his capacity for telling the truth, at last

announced Sir Ham Pennywoddle's triumph out of a window to a by no means surprised mob that had gathered outside the building. Some young gentlemen from the grammar school, who wore yellow tassels to their college caps, and had just been let out of class, set up a cheer and plied their satchels over each other's heads to get up the semblance of an excitement; but the public commotion went no farther. Sir Ham's mourning dispensed him from attending a festive dinner which his committee-men held at the Springfield Arms, so having made a speech from the balcony of the house, and promised Mr. Grindle the hostler, Mr. Touzle the photographer, and the rest of the mob, as also the grammar-school boys, that he would defend our ancient Constitution, the Established Church, and the interests of Licensed Victuallers; he shook hands with numerous persons he had never seen before, sprang into his carriage with Mr. Dexter, and was whirled home to the congratulations of Lady Pennywoddle and Miss Mary and to dinner. It was an overcooked dinner from having been kept waiting, but Sir Ham's contentment left him no palate to be critical. He repeated six times: "I shall have to get some black breeches, Mary, to dine with the Speaker;" and when he was left alone over his wine with Mr. Dexter the vanity of his new-won title of M. P. seemed to fume up into his head with the port; and his gratitude bubbled up along with it.

"Look 'ee here, Dexter," he said, for the first time discarding the "Muster," and putting up both his legs on a chair, "you've made a man o' me, and I shan't be easy until I've done you a good turn too."

"You owe me no thanks, Sir Ham, I assure you. I must have been beaten if I had gone to poll."

"No you wouldn't," answered the knight obdurately. "Help yourself to some o' that port. I know how the facts are. Lord Mayrose would have stood by you, and I don't wonder at it, for you are an educated young chap like him. Then I expect he feels a bit sore at my havin' some of his old estates, for he ain't had time to see that I want to do him good."

"He is too straightforward to think you could wish to do him harm," answered Mr. Dexter, adding nothing to this reply, but listening with a curious attention to what the Warden of the Sausage-makers said next.

"Aye, but that's not what I mean. I'd do him more good than he thinks for," rejoined the knight mysteriously; after which he suddenly lapsed sad, and made plaits on the napkin that lay on his lap. "It was a great trouble to me when my poor Mike died, Dexter. I'd have got into the House of Lords for his sake, and he'd have worn his coronet with the best o' them. But now its my Mary who'll have this place, the lands and everything I have. There's many a dook would be glad to marry her, Dexter," and he sighed. "But we'll talk of something else just now," added honest Sir Ham, blinking, "for I've not grown out of feeling yet that poor Mike may come in at any moment and sit down in his old place—there where you are sittin'. I want to know what I can do for you."

"You have given me a very agreeable week's holiday, Sir Ham," replied Mr. Dexter, perhaps not much relishing the possibility of Mike's sudden arrival, "which I much wanted, for I had been running about for a month on a fatiguing business—collecting information about a paper I want to found."

"Aye, you've talked to me of that paper," said Sir Ham, with grave interest; "tell me all about it."

"It's a paper of quite a new sort," answered Mr. Dexter, but without showing any of the suspicious eagerness peculiar to scheme promoters and inventors. "It's a paper we want much in England, and I think there's a fortune in it. The name would be the *Reporter and Law Court Gazette*, and it would be wholly confined to legal news and reports. There are some law papers now, but they are like weekly reviews, and circulate only among professional men. The *Reporter* must be a daily penny journal, of the size of the ordinary dailies, and appeal to all classes of readers. You know what attractions assize news and police reports have for most of the public: some people read nothing else in the papers."

"I always read the police news and criminal trials," assented Sir Ham, whose interest increased.

"Just so. Well, the *Reporter* would treat of these topics in a more thorough

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way than is possible to the average papers, who have to deal with politics, commerce, art, and everything. The French have a daily law-paper, the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, which has been a great success from the first; but I should aim at doing greater things on the grander scale which distinguishes English journalism. The *Reporter* would give the fullest accounts of the police-court cases, the assize trials, the law-suits at Westminster and Lincoln's Inn; publish letters from foreign correspondents relative to important trials abroad; and above all, print three or four well-written leaders a day to elucidate points of law, explain and criticise judgments. The paper ought to wield immense influence, if well conducted, and I should try to engage barristers and solicitors of the best proved ability to write for it. If my plan were realized, people would go to the *Reporter* for the most authentic legal records as they go to *Hansard* for Parliamentary debates; and judges, lawyers, and suitors would learn to respect it as a high-class authority. As one of its subsidiary objects, the *Reporter* would, of course, advocate necessary reforms in law and procedure, and urge the necessity for codifying our numberless and intricate Acts of Parliament."

"And how much would it cost to start this paper?" asked Sir Ham, in a dazzled sort of tone.

"It requires about thirty thousand pounds to set a London daily paper fairly going, and other ten thousand to fall back upon," answered Mr. Dexter, cracking a walnut. "I have two or three thousand pounds myself, and shall be able to get about a dozen of my friends to risk from two thousand to five thousand each in the enterprise. We shall make a joint stock thing of it, with limited liability."

There was a moment's silence, and Sir Ham leaned forward.

"Well now, Dexter, I'll tell you a better way than that," he broke out, taking his legs off the chair, and centring his round eyes on the barrister. "Supposin' you just let me and you do this business between us, friendly like? I'll find the money, and you set the paper working."

"Your offer is extremely generous, but I am afraid I dare not accept it, for I cannot guarantee the success of the paper," laughed Mr. Dexter, with great honesty: "and then, supposing I failed with my friends we should each lose our money, and there would be an end of the matter; whereas if I dragged you into a bad venture I should owe you forty thousand pounds, and should have the misery of feeling that I could never repay you such a sum."

"Aye, if you failed, but if you did, I shouldn't be beggared for forty thousand pounds, my lad," answered Sir Ham, with a touch of city pomp, smileless and wheezing. "But I know you won't fail—you've just the stuff in you that I had when I set up in business. You've behaved handsome to me, too, and I don't care who hears me say it."

Mr. Dexter nobly combated Sir Ham's grateful wish to be his partner, and left none of the hazardous aspects of newspaper ventures unexposed. He even doubted whether his sense of indebtedness to Sir Ham would not paralyse that reckless nerve which is needed by those who embark in great speculations; and this was the more disinterested of him as—he it said at once—the twelve friends who were to assist him with sums of from two to five thousand pounds each were evolved, the whole dozen of them, from his inner consciousness. But the more he sought to dissuade the knight, the greater was the latter's obstinacy—a smooth, holdfast obstinacy—in desiring to help equip the *Reporter*. Sir Ham was not so tenacious of his gold as to object to occasional speculation, nor so dead to the love of profits as not to prefer a good speculation to a bad one; and this speculation—he knowing nought of newspapers except that they paid well when prosperous—had the chink of good metal in his ears. If, therefore, it succeeded he would have had the gratification of being generous on remunerative terms—which may be called charity with a winning smile.

There were other considerations to which the red port lent prismatic tints, such as the social power which the possession of a great newspaper confers and the benefit that might accrue from tying up to his fortune by such a chain as forty thousand pounds so able a man as Mr. Dexter. The barrister might become his benefactor's ally and doughty friend, upholding him through future elections as he

had done through this one ; and it may have been this which moved the new M. P. to eloquence. Anyhow, in the result, though by degrees, Sir Ham was enabled to overcome Mr. Dexter's scruples. Thereon, flushed by argument and wine, he covenanted that a deed of partnership should be drawn up making of this unborn *Reporter* three shares, valuable at twelve thousand dollars each, whereof two were to be his, and the third Mr. Dexter's, with power to the latter to buy up one-fourth of Sir Ham's two shares (so as to become half partner) at any time within ten years on payment of six thousand pounds, with compound interest at five per cent. Sir Ham was never slothful when there were figures flying about. He rang the bell for pens and paper ; and when the butler returned an hour after bringing these things to say that tea had been served in the drawing-room, he beheld Sir Ham with his coat off—for it was hot—and perspiring over the fifteenth clause of his draft, while sheets already written on were littered among the dessert-plates. "If either of the partners should disagree about any of these here clauses," stammered Sir Ham. "But they won't disagree, eh, Dexter? What is it?" and the knight made a blot.

"Her ladyship sent me to say that tea was on the table, Sir Ham," said the butler.

"But it ain't half-past nine yet," growled Sir Ham.

It was in truth half-past ten, but Mr. Dexter had been so taken up with Sir Ham and Sir Ham with Mr. Dexter, that neither had watched the minutes go. So the young barrister now suggested that the draft should be drawn up when they both went up to town by Mr. Deedes, of New Square, and this being acceded to they adjourned to the tea-room.

"Jane, Mary," ejaculated Sir Ham, trotting in behind his guest, "Muster Dexter and I are partners ; we're going to found a newspaper together."

"Deary me, Ham!" exclaimed Lady Pennywoddle ; but Mary, busy with the sugar-basin and tongs behind the silver urn, dropped lumps into the cups, and made no remark.

"You don't say nothing, Mary," ventured Sir Ham from his arm-chair. "What is it you most read in the noospaper, my dear?"

"I don't often read the papers, papa. When I do it's the accidents and trials," answered truthful Mary.

"Well, my dear, this'll be a paper chokefull of trials. It'll be like a novel. It's Dexter who's invented it."

"Mr. Dexter is very clever," said Mary, beginning to pour out the cream.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHAT IS A GENTLEMAN?"

Now a foreigner contended that one hundred and fifty sentiments could be expressed in a kick ; so a young lady can give one hundred and fifty intonations to the remark that a gentleman is clever, and Mary Pennywoddle's intonation was not, perhaps, that which Mr. Dexter would have loved. Whilst entralling Sir Ham, and climbing to a high pinnacle in the respect of Lady Pennywoddle, the barrister had, strange to say, made but little progress with Miss Mary. She had been civil from the first, and remained so ; but Mr. Dexter found his advances towards more genial intercourse repelled by a barrier of ice, rather remarkable from the fact that iciness was no part of Mary Pennywoddle's ordinary character. She was a methodical little person—tidy, plain-spoken, and demure. She liked to see the chairs straight, the mantel-shelves well dusted, and the poor whom she patronized wearing prints of uncompromising stiffness and stockings properly darned ; but her talk was spirited enough, and her hazel glances had often sparkled with amusement in company less delectable than Mr. Dexter's. Why, then, did she seem to view this gentleman with a cool and careful eye?

This is what Sir Ham's visitor had asked himself more than once, and during the few days that intervened between the election and that when the new M. P. and his family were to leave for town he redoubled in the most patient way his

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efforts to please. To nine hundred and ninety-nine women out of a thousand he would have appeared the most delightful of beings, and Lady Pennywoddle, who felt at home with him, thanks to the deftness with which he always placed his conversation on the level of hers, declared that he must be a blessing to his mother—or to his aunt, when she learned with concern that he was motherless. There is a great art in being able to heighten or lower one's chats by an octave to suit all tongues, and a man is not a true talker unless he remember that his intellect should be like a piano. Mr. Dexter, who could dissert on protoplasm and natural selection in such wise as to comfort the most self-satisfied Rugbeian who ever bored a College wine party, would, when Sir Ham was not within ear-shot, lead his lady to dilate on the fascinations of that shop in Pudding Lane, and take a pleasure in the retrospect which drew a smile even from Mary. Sir Ham's daughter showed Mr. Dexter no outward aversion. Her unaccountable coldness was inward, and perceptible only to himself; externally she behaved towards him with the correct blandness of young ladies who have been trained at a fashionable Brighton school, and who desire to play their parts dutifully towards their parents' friends.

So, profiting by the general humour he had excited at breakfast one morning by recounting how he had been chased by the Procter down the Oxford Corn-Market, and fined ten shillings for smoking a cigarette, Mr. Dexter said when the breakfast was over—

"I hope you will allow me to go with you to the village school, Miss Pennywoddle; I hear you are to examine a class?"

"But I thought you were going to London to see Mr. Deedes about your newspaper?" returned Mary.

"Sir Ham and I shall not start till the one o'clock train and I have more than two hours before me," explained Mr. Dexter.

"Let Mr. Dexter walk with you, Mary, my dear," said Lady Pennywoddle, preparing to start on her household duties, with a basketful of keys numerous enough to keep the tea and sugar of a whole county in custody. "It's a sight for sore eyes to see them children, Mr. Dexter; but wrap yourself up warm, Mary, my dear, for it has bin snowin'."

"You'll see it's a proper school, Dexter, which I built myself, and cost six hundred pun'," remarked Sir Ham, toddling towards the door with a sheaf of letters in both his round hands. "The boys and gals are taught their Bibles, and to respect their betters, which is the choicest schoolin' I know of."

"Certainly the best of all," assented Mr. Dexter.

"Come by all means, if you like," answered Mary, quietly. "The children may amuse you, and you are certain to amuse them;" and with this little thrust she withdrew to put on her bonnet and cloak, whilst her remarkable parents separated, the one to his study with his letters, the other to the kitchen regions.

These kitchen regions were Lady Pennywoddle's paradise; and the hour she devoted to them every morning was the happiest of her day. Somewhat reluctantly Sir Ham had allowed his wife to remain her own housekeeper, and it was with that softened look attaching to all occupations which recall a poetic past that the worthy lady reviewed the pantry and sculleries, put the saucepans through their facings, and dipped her nose into the jelly-moulds. She would stand in her broad dress of silk and crape, prodding the raw joints with a fork, holding up giblets to the light, and testing by the naivest known process the freshness of the fish, so that the purveyors of Penny brought their wares with a depressed feeling that it was no use carrying short weight or inferior quality to this house. Most depressed of all, though, was the pork butcher, for, having to face in her ladyship a critic of professional competence, this miserable man was haunted by the continuous fear of adverse verdicts as to his sausages, pigs'-faces, and spare-ribs, nor would anything save a blameless conscience have borne him through it. Need it be added that there was no waste at Penny, and that, in despite of this, the sleekness of the servants would have qualified them to be German princes or Spanish queens according to their sexes or tastes.

As to Sir Ham, the morning was not so pleasant a period to him, for epistolary correspondence was the one bitter drop in the cup of his riches. In London he

had clerks for the unimportant letters, but till meeting Mr. Dexter he had never so far trusted a human being as to read him a letter treating of great interests. To the barrister he had not only of late read such letters, but had fished stealthily for his advice about answering them; and Mr. Dexter's advice was so sound—he would suggest language so pointed in which to convey refusals, phrases so pithy for dismissing complaints, that Sir Ham saw him with regret go out to the schools. "I think I'll keep these letters till you come back," he said, making his way across the hall where Mr. Dexter was opening the door for Mary, when the latter had come down. "Our company's thinkin' of a lawsuit with the Beef-boilers, and I'd like to know your mind about it."

"I shall be at your service, Sir Ham," replied Mr. Dexter, relieving Mary of a pile of Dickens's novels she was hugging with her muff.

"They are books for the teacher to read in the evenings," said Mary Pennywoddle, buttoning her glove; and, Sir Ham having been kissed, the two young couple set out together over the snow, which crushed under their feet like silk being torn.

"You had better give me your arm," proposed Mr. Dexter. "These mornings with dry snow on the ground, and the sun overhead, are apt to be slippery."

"The schools are quite close," answered Mary, nevertheless giving him her arm. "But you surely are not going to stay with the children the whole two hours?"

"You shall send me away when you find me *de trop*. But I delight in schools; I saw Lord Mayrose's at Springfield the other day, and I should like to compare."

Mary said nothing, but seemed absorbed in some sparrows who were hopping over the snow, leaving footprints like little stars.

"Lord Mayrose always supported his village schools, they say, though he had so little money," resumed Mr. Dexter, easily. "He is just one of those men who deserve to be rich."

"What could riches do for him?" enquired Mary coldly.

"Not much for him, but for others; and his marriage with Lady Azalea Carol will, therefore, be a public blessing. She brings him twenty thousand a year."

"Lord Mayrose is going to be married?" asked Mary, calmly, and it was perhaps fancy, but Mr. Dexter thought he could detect the faintest flutter in the small hand that lay on his arm.

"Yes, I heard it in Hivesborough last night," said the barrister, "and I meant to tell Sir Ham, but forgot. It was being talked of in the shops, and everyone appeared glad. Mayrose has lost no time since his return, but it was urgent he should make a rich marriage if he wished to get on."

"Get on?" echoed Mary, with surprise, and there was still a slight fluttering in her hand. But she walked with staid little steps, her black dress standing out like a shadow on the white snow around, and her features tinted pink by the prickly air of the morning.

"I mean get on as a peer," said Mr. Dexter. "Poor peers are terribly handicapped if they have any ambition in them."

"I hope Lord Mayrose is not marrying for money," replied Mary, with an animation that sent a quiver to her voice. "The man who does that is the meanest of beings—he deserves no happiness in life, and I believe God sends him none."

"Oh, but Lady Azalea is extremely beautiful, and this is certainly a love-match," said Mr. Dexter, quietly, and without evincing astonishment. "Only Mayrose could not have afforded to marry her if she was poor, that is all. He said to me rather mournfully that he wished he had my chances—that is, I suppose, that he had to climb his way from the bottom of the ladder."

"Oh! you will not be long climbing, Mr. Dexter," exclaimed Mary.

"I have no ambition to climb high, Miss Pennywoddle."

"Yet if I could see into the future I have no doubt I should find you very high. Men like yourself never stop half-way."

"Men like me?" and he smiled.

"Men so amiable," and she smiled slightly too. "I have never heard you speak ill of anybody—nor of anything," added she, after a slight pause.

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"That sounds like an epigram."

"I don't intend it to be an unkind one; but we are not all saints on earth, and everything is not exactly as it should be, judging from what I hear other people say. So you are either very guileless or very careful to conceal your opinions."

"Will you believe me that I never met a person in whom there was not some good," answered Mr. Dexter, with a pleasant smile, "nor any so-called abuse which had not its redeeming side. Life is a path strewn with flints and flowers. There are so many who complain of the flints that I may be pardoned for remembering that the flowers were not wholly sown in vain."

He was so gentlemanlike and rational, there was such an indulgent benevolence in all he said, so much tranquil dignity in his manners and appearance, that any average woman would have felt her heart soften to him. Whatever may have been Mary Pennywoddle's impressions, she disputed no longer, and in a few minutes they reached the brick school-house, which had a small stone belfry with a bell, a clock on its facade, and underneath a dark marble tablet, setting forth in golden letters the date when Lady Pennywoddle had graciously laid the foundation-stone.

Mr. Dexter did not remain two hours in this brick building, because he soon discovered he should be in the way. It was a mixed school, with boys arranged in rows to the right and girls to the left, the seats being according to age, and the little ones with their thumbs in their mouths nearest to the fireplace at the entrance. The room had the substantial and cozy look derivable from the formula, "regardless of expense"—a formula that had been applied to the ordinance of all things at Penny. And here let it be respectfully submitted that those who write of the vulgar splendour of parvenu palaces prove, like those who describe the climate of the moon and stars, that they know little of these places. If Sir Ham had been compelled to build and furnish his own mansion he would doubtless have given it the aspect of a Stilton cheese, and have furnished it red and yellow; but the architects, decorators, painters, and upholsterers who had reared Penny in what had once been a mangel field and made it beautiful, had not asked the knight for his advice. They had gone to work with his cheque-book for a fountain of inspiration, and had raised a structure which would have been pronounced noble if it had been tenanted by an Earl, and a gem of luxury and good taste if it had been transported to Italy. So with these schools; the fittings were just those which a model-school should be. There was warmth and ventilation, neat forms and commodious desks. A piano standing in one corner and harmonium opposite showed that the place could be transformed into a concert or ball room, as the recreative needs of the Penny villagers might require; and large maps in plain, attractive colours brightened the walls. Then between these maps and on the walls themselves were painted the names of the Sovereigns of England, with the great events and illustrious names that marked each reign. And maybe sundry Britons not villagers would have been the better for sitting a few hours every day in this school and accustoming their eyes to the dates when Magna Charta was signed, and the later date when the precursors of Cardinal Cullen burned the forerunners of many a modern Home-Ruler for the behoof of their souls.

But a great squealing was audible as Mr. Dexter, after turning the handle of the outer door, pushed open the red baize folding-doors within; and a chubby youngster, with a flaxen poll, sat wailing, with his knuckles in his eyes.

"What are you crying for, Jimmy?" asked Mary Pennywoddle, passing in and stooping over him.

"'Cos teacher wants me to say A," blubbered this young son of the soil.

"And why won't you say A?"

"'Cos if I does she'll want me to say B," roared Jimmy, like a prudent lad who takes his precautions in advance.

"I am afraid they give you great trouble, Grace," said Mary. "This is Mr. Dexter—Mr. Dexter, my friend, Miss Grace Marvell."

Mr. Dexter bowed, and Mary kissed Miss Marvell. It was quite in keeping with Mary Pennywoddle's nature to do this thing—to call the school-teacher her friend and to behave towards her with sisterly respect and familiarity; but Miss Grace

was a person whom many—especially of the opposite sex—would have been pleased to call their friend on any terms. She was rightly named Marvell, and it was the greatest marvel of all to find her nestled in a rustic school and explaining the parts of speech to rising bumpkins. Tall, faultlessly moulded, and graceful—a beauty, with wavy, chestnut hair, lustrous eyes, and a small, exquisite mouth—she was one to whom the empire of silks, jewels, and men's worship seems to belong by Nature's patent; and here in this school she looked like a queen defrauded of her rights. Subsequently Mr. Dexter learned that she was a former school-fellow of Mary's, whose parents had been ruined, and who had declined to accept the charity of a companionship or to affront the sauciness of well-bred butlers and ladies'-maids as a governess. For the present he could only admire her in silence, as he would admire the tinted Venus in a hovel; and he sat near the fire in the blue leather arm-chair which was her only throne till further orders, while she and Mary went through a Bible examination of the classes. Mr. Dexter listened just long enough to find the decent pretext for retiring so as to help Sir Ham with his correspondence, and as he rose to leave the following instructive dialogue caught his ears.

"What is a gentleman?" asked Mary of a boy three feet high, in corduroys.

"A man as tells the tooth, miss."

"And what is truth-telling, Johnny? Take your finger out of your mouth, there's a good boy."

"Not to tell loys," answered Johnny, wiping his finger on the corduroys.

"And what shall you call a lie when you are a gentleman, Johnny?"

As Johnny seemed puzzled as to the line of morality he should adopt at this far-off date, and as he was working his finger up his pinafore again on the way to his lips, twenty urchins held up their red fists; and one with copper-toed shoes shouted, with the readiness of an old lesson, "A man is a loyar, miss, who says or does summat that makes him get what isn't his'n, and that he daren't swear to alone afore God, and if he had all the money in England a loyar wouldn't be a gememmun."

"That's right, Teddy," said Mary Pennywoddle, as she turned towards Mr. Dexter.

CHAPTER XVII.

AD AUGUSTA PER AUGUSTA.

A few days after this Mr. Dexter returned to London with Sir Ham, who was much put out by the rumour of Mayrose's marriage—rumour which, be it said at once, was baseless. The report had come into Hivesborough through one of the maids at Elmwood, who had nothing to conceal from a young carpenter in the town; which young carpenter having a sister who was married to the hair-cutter in the market-place the intelligence had got about pretty quickly into the ears of all the people who came to be shaved and shampooed. When applied to newspaper items this manner of obtaining news is called "special information;" in the case of memoirs and biographies it is styled "materials gathered from authentic sources." In either case the news so acquired is more pleasing than that to be had from ordinary channels, for according to the maid's version Lord Mayrose had not fallen from his horse, but had thrown himself on his knees in a field, and vowed he would never rise till Lady Zell allowed him "to put up the banns." Even if this had been true it is not the version that would have been circulated for the credence of Society, so that biographers and journalists cannot be too much encouraged to prefer, as heretofore, recondite sources to official ones.

Mayrose was not going to be married; but whilst the Prime Warden of the Sausage-Makers was bemoaning his stupidity for courting such a fate, and even pondering whether there was no means of saving him from it, he was feeling like his old self again, for events had begun to brighten for him in various ways. In the first place, the little cloud over his relations with Elmwood had been happily dispelled by an affectionate letter from Lady Rosemary, who wondered, in answer to his own note, "how he could talk of diminished confidence or any dismal thing

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of that kind." She bantered him with cheerfulness about his fear of the Penny-woddles, but cautioned him gently, as she had done before, against quarrelling with these potent neighbours, seeing that any incivility on his part might be attributed to unworthy motives of envy or arrogance. As to the passage in his letter which referred to Zellie, the Countess dismissed it briefly in these terms; "I accept your kind wishes for Zellie, but without knowing whether her marriage with Lord Hornette is so certain as you appear to think. The matter rests with Zellie herself, and it would be undesirable that any rumour of the match should be bruited before she has been proposed to and given her answer." These lines sent the blood tingling to Mayrose's face in quick surprise; for what if Zellie's answer—which he had thought already given in the affirmative—should be a refusal? What if he had been mistaken all along in supposing that Lady Rosemary's daughter wished to marry Lord Hornette, or that Lady Rosemary herself desired her to do so?

But this was only the first breeze in the fair wind that gladdened Mayrose. Contrary to all expectations, the general election ordered by Mr. Paradyse had resulted in the triumph of Mr. Paramount; whereat Mr. Paradyse, more in sorrow than in anger at the wayward country which had deserted him, tendered his resignation. Never was a nation more astonished, and never were writers and politicians more crestfallen than those who had marched the march of glory behind Mr. Paradyse; for whenever this great man's supporters had been beaten in single elections it was the Tobacco interest that had done it all, or the Soda water interest, or both these interests acting in collusion with the Shaker Brotherhood, who, it is well known, wanted to hold their dances in the churches of the Establishment, and were wroth at being forbidden. In fine, though Mr. Paradyse's backers had reluctantly admitted that he might be unpopular here and there in the abstract, yet they had held like one man to their belief as to his popularity in the concrete, and it caused them much dampness to find such evidences to the opposite. Let no one doubt that they tried to console themselves in the usual way, by printing statistics to show how different it might have been if the constituencies had been otherwise; and the humorous papers of the party printed cartoons of Mr. Paramount being puffed into Downing-street by the smoke of tobacco-pipes. But these jests, good as they were, rang a little hollow, and the general impression was as of something startling. Perhaps, however, the person most startled of all was he who had most reason to rejoice at this turn of the tide—Mr. Paramount himself. An angler, who has been patiently waiting to catch one fish, and who lands a netful, may experience the sensations which this distinguished statesman felt; but Mr. Paramount was an impenetrable man, who let nothing of his surprise be seen to the public eye. Commanded by the Queen to form a Ministry, he summoned his lieutenants around him, and met them at Lord Rosemary's town house in Belgrave Square, which was large and commodious for such meetings. Lady Rosemary, who went to town to do the honours, wrote instantly to Mayrose to come to London, too, adding with her usual tact—no doubt, lest he should scruple to seem presumptuous—that Mr. Paramount particularly desired his attendance. It was her ladyship who underlined the word.

Now, if Mr. Paramount had one merit acknowledged even by his foes it was that of knowing how to choose men. He might not resemble Pitt in other respects, but he did in this one, and it was a high compliment to Mayrose that the new Premier should be willing to employ him, untried as he was, and unknown to the world. Mayrose did not affect to consider it a compliment, for, in his modesty, he ascribed the honour to Lady Rosemary's sole agency; and in his heart of hearts he deplored that the opportunity would not now be given him of deserving his spurs before he obtained them. His pleasure at the overthrow of Mr. Paradyse was indeed wholly patriotic, for his own purposes would have been better furthered had the late Administration remained in office throughout the session. As an Opposition speaker he could have poured out his entire soul in assailing a Government whose policy he thought mistaken; but with his own party in power his situation was one of perplexity. If he refused to accept place he could not, without a show of bumpiousness unbecoming in one of his years, constitute himself a censor of his party; if, on the other hand, he took a post, he would be reduced to cultivating

the official mysticism of style peculiar to Under-Secretaries, and to holding his peace altogether when not actually dragged into debate. So in either event he would be to a great extent gagged. There was only this consolation, that in office he could labour with might and main to be of use to the community; so he arrived in London resolved to abide by Lord Rosemary's advice whatever it should be.

His hansom coming straight from the station amid the racket and life of town on a bright winter morning, drew up amid a great throng of carriages, which, depositing their noble and right honourable occupants on the pavement, had wheeled off and arrayed themselves in a line with the horses' heads facing the house. This line of champing animals, who tossed their bits and studded the frosty earth with white flakes of foam, stretched half-way down one side of the square, and all the flashing liveries familiar to west end shone in it—the claret colour and cockade of Lord Beaujolais, who it was already known would return to his old post in the Household; the white and scarlet of Lady Coralmere; Colonel Dandelion's grass-hued brougham; and glittering high amid them all, the black and yellow chariot of the Duke of Bumblebeigh, with its escutcheon of drones rampant and its motto, "*Sans miel ni fel.*"

Mayrose saw that he had lighted upon the very thick of the quarry for honours and emoluments, and he questioned whether his morning costume would do for such illustrious company; but to his great relief he was not shown into the room where the new rulers of the kingdom were assembled. A servant led him up a muffled staircase to Lady Rosemary's private boudoir, and there he remained alone a few minutes with some China pug-dogs, very rare and ugly, till the Countess joined him. She was all kind smiles and welcome, and if Mayrose had felt any remnant of nervousness at the thought of this meeting, it all melted away in the warmth of her looks. No allusion was made to Zellie. Lady Rosemary kissed him on the forehead, said a few laughing words about that "confidence" of which he had dreaded to be bereft because of Miss Pennywoddle's camelia, and then came to the important matter in hand.

"We shall not be together five minutes, Freddy, for I have left quite twenty ladies in the next room, and the gentlemen are down-stairs parting what remains of the loaves and fishes among them."

"May I congratulate you on the Earl's appointment?" asked Mayrose, not doubting that the Earl had been reinstated first on the list to the keepership of the waste papers.

"Yes, I am to be Lady Keeper again," said she, smiling, and making him sit down by her side; "but now we must speak about yourself. Mr. Paramount knows how much you would chafe at taking any office which might appear to be given you from mere patronage, so he wants you to move the Address to the Queen's Speech in the House of Lords. The Under-Secretaryship of the Australian colonies will be kept open meanwhile, and when you have made your *debut* in a speech which you must try to render as brilliant as you can, so that it may dazzle everybody, then you will be gazetted, and people will say then that your appointment was not a piece of favour but a piece of justice."

"This is kinder than I can express, dear Lady Rosemary," muttered Mayrose, who was really touched at the delicate thoughtfulness which had planned that his self-esteem might not suffer the slightest ruffling.

"You must thank Mr. Paramount," answered the Countess, lightly, and striving after her generous wont to lessen the gratitude due to her. "Lord Albert Drone, the Duke's brother, is to be Secretary for Australia. He is very nice, and you will certainly find him easy to work with."

"I would work well with a Tartar to justify this unmerited favour," answered Mayrose, with feeling.

"Oh, but the favour will not be unmerited," insisted the Countess gaily. "There is not much to say generally in moving an Address to the Throne, but there is much in the manner of saying the little. Besides you can make an exception and say a great deal—criticise the past Government."

"I must try and forget that it is dead and buried, then," laughed Mayrose; "at all events I will pray against being dull."

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"That you could never be if you tried," she said, with a motherly look. "Mr. Paramount speaks with positive enthusiasm of you, and I must tell you, Freddy, that you are already credited with having forced Mr. Dexter to retire, and with having gained us a seat with Sir Ham Pennywoddle. Mr. Dexter was growing to be a dangerous critic in the House; and Sir Ham, who has large city influence, was supposed to belong to the other side until you converted him."

"I assure you I have converted nobody," protested Mayrose, frowning a little to see the inevitable Sir Ham dog him even to this boudoir. "As to Mr. Dexter, dear Lady Rosemary, I meant to help him."

"Well, it would not be prudent to confess that," laughed the Countess. "The exploits have been counted to you for 'party services,' and it is well to begin early with party services. Then I fancy Mr. Paramount will be more at his ease if you let him think he is indebted to you."

This was a new view, but whether it would have led to a discussion on political casuistry is not ascertainable, for the few minutes which Lady Rosemary could give to her protégé was now over. A little clock stationed between two Dresden shepherdesses tinkled out the hour which had been fixed for a general partisan luncheon, and the Countess took Mayrose's arm to return among the ladies. They passed through a velvet door-curtain, along a room with miniature enamel paintings and Gobelins tapestry, and thence penetrated into a bower, where the silvery hubbub of feminine politics was rife. And it was a brave sight to see them all in their war-paint, rustling skirts, and exulting eyes—these pretty tyrants of the misnomered weak sex, who, through their husbands, cousins, or other male belongings, were about to skake the royal sceptre as for a transformation scene over the empire where the sun never sets. Favourite chaplains to be transfigured into deans; deans into bishops; young brothers to be shipped out as colonial governors; pet doctors to be knighted; ambassadorships to be intrigued for; commissionerships to be danced at; Garters, Bath ribands, coronets, judges' ermine, Maid-of-honour rosettes to be begged for with appealing dimples, seized with rosy fingers, carried off in ecstasy—all these things whirled about like a living diorama before the open eyes of these delighted and delightful creatures. Nor had the term "Paramount *vice* Paradyse" any other sense in their minds than that of this diorama. Lady Coralmere was in the room, and so was comely Lady Beaujolais, and to the numerous other ladies whom he had never seen (neither Zellie nor Violet were here) Mayrose was now introduced. There were some sunny Ladies Drone among them in corded silks and sable furs, and some chirruping, wide-awake Ladies Keane-Forester with otter-skin muffs, and some winsome ladies of that great house of Rodent-Midge, which has fed off the Budget without cease or loss of appetite since the Charter Day at Runnymede; and at the hands of all these blonde and brunette despots of our souls and bodies Mayrose endured the fate reserved to every man who is handsome, blithe-tempered, a bachelor, and who moreover stands alone with two dozen of the adverse sex scrutinizing him. Perhaps he would have liked that the smiles and petting bestowed on him should have been less similar to those conferred on poodle-dogs—for he detected a disquieting resemblance between the two—but then he was so self-possessed and ready of wit, so well-dressed, young, and teeming with good spirits, that ladies could not but treat him as essentially their own peculiar property. In a brief space they had all concurred in a scheme for attending the House of Lords in a galaxy on the opening of the session, and hearing this poodle-peer move his address.

"What uniform shall you wear, Lord Mayrose?" asked Lady Coralmere, who glanced at him more and more every time they met, and now dropped one of her grey gloves that he might have the happiness of picking it up.

"I think I can wear the Hiveshire Yeomanry uniform," laughed Mayrose, restoring the glove.

"Which is blue and silver, with a brass helmet," said a crimp-haired Lady Drone, with admiration.

"It should be blue," approved Lady Beaujolais; "red does not show off so well against the scarlet benches in the House of Lords."

"I like gold better than silver—if there's a great deal of it," observed a Lady Rodent-Midge, enthusiastically.

"And all the illustrated papers will publish your portrait," remarked Lady Coralmere, with a look of speculation as to whether it would be in full face or profile.

"And biographical notices," added Lady Beaujolais. "Think of that!"

"With the date of my birth, and the rest blank," smiled Mayrose. At which there was a flattering outcry that blanks are easily filled up by those who please, and that men, like nations, are the happiest who are too young to have a history, but in the midst of these dulcet encouragements a door down-stairs was heard opening, and a unanimous soft "Ah!" from the ladies indicated that the half hundred or so of salaried posts which form a Government must probably have been filled up now, so that there stood no further impediment in the way of luncheon.

This surmise was correct. Statesmen's feet trod through the hall below and in cadence ascended the staircase, all of them the lighter for the heavy weight of emoluments and responsibilities which they were thenceforth to carry. They surged on the landing and flowed into the ladies' room in a patriotic tide, screwing down their pencil-cases, thrusting lists into their waistcoat-pockets and wearing jaunty yet ruminating looks, as though each man felt that he should dearly love the particular post which his neighbour had got. There was the Duke of Bumblebeigh, who cared for none of these things himself, but who, as the Nestor of the party, came to see that no one of his kinsmen was forgotten in the distribution, a point about which these kinsmen also took care themselves. His Grace was to his son Lord Hornette what the yellow and faded original of an engraving is to a later reprint of it. He had passed through time when it had been the fashion for every Briton of brains to sneer at dukes, but he had seen dukes and their power live down the sneerers, and now that he was tottering at his leisure towards the vault where his fathers lay, he could comfort himself with the reflection that dukes in general, and Dukes of Bumblebeigh in particular, would survive the sneers of the next generations also; aye, and of many a generation following. Beside him, alert on his boot-tips stepped his younger and politic brother, Lord Albert, more widely known as Balbie Drone, the new Secretary for Australia, of whom we shall see more anon, for he was to be Mayrose's chief. Then, after massive Lord Stonehenge, the granite head of this Administration, and Sir Tito Tumb, who fitted into round holes or square holes alike, came buoyant Lord Beaujolais, with silky beard gaily trimmed, who cast an imperceptible nod at his wife, as if to assure her that the little bit of patronage she had desired for one of her relations had been effected precisely according to her orders; and Lord Rosemary came, with laugh ever serene as healthy weather, and showing no appearance of being raised in his own esteem, or lowered in it, by his Lord Keepership; and centrally in the throng, with followers before and followers behind, and strangely blended looks of obedience and affected independence thrown on his path, like the *confetti*—some sugar, some plaster—showered on the Corso at Rome in Carnival time, came Mr. Paramount, towards whom Mayrose advanced with a few muttered words of thanks and homage.

The air of victory sat well on Mr. Paramount. Good humour, self-confident speech, and impervious reserve, made him the born leader of a shy and brooding people; so that those who talked of his dominancy as insecure neither knew the man nor the men who trooped after him. He shook Mayrose's hand with condescending cordiality, and administered to him the ointment of office in a few well-chosen words:—"We have to thank you for winning us such a welcome recruit as Sir Ham Pennywoddle," he said.

Mayrose had judgment enough to see that he was in the position of a subordinate now, and must not contradict his commander, so he simply bowed with the aspect of a man who has enlisted and been given the shilling.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

TO TRIUMPH!

Her Majesty graciously deigned to open Parliament in person that year, and mobs of her liege subjects, marshalled by the police between Buckingham Palace and Westminster, enjoyed the pageant of Life Guards, gilt coach, cream-coloured horses with milk tails, Beef-eaters, and the yet more beatific vision of the Royal Crown being borne on the knees of an old gentleman, who held it as if it were a piece of pastry. One of these days the Economists, who have lodged British Royalty in a house well suited for a hospital, will discover that the way to Westminster is much shorter in a four-wheeled cab, with a shilling fare and an extra twopence for the Crown carried as luggage on the top; but meanwhile the antique pomp causes almost as much pleasure as the saving resulting from the cab-hire would, and thus once again the mobs were pleased on the occasion of his return to power. The reading of Mr. Paramount's speech from the Throne to the Peers and to as many of the Commons as could jostle behind the bar, would have been an exciting ceremony even if managed by the Lord Chancellor assisted by Commissioners in cocked hats; but it was generally felt that the presence of Royalty lent an additional and fitting lustre to Mr. Paramount's triumph. As the curiosity was great to hear what the new Ministry had to say, the Foreign Ambassadors were all at their posts, in a serried row of golden swallow-tails and well-oiled countenances, were the Envoys of the heathen Chinese, Japanese, and other wondrous Semitic "ese"—Peeresses and their daughters undulated in a restless sea of diamonds, silks, and satins, crested with plumes, Mechlin lace and *tulle bouillonnee*. The Peers temporal, gorgeous in their scarlet robes and lappets of ermine, with four rows of black tails—three, two, or one, according to their several degrees—and the Reverend Fathers in God cloaking the Episcopal bench in waves of sable satin and lawn, completed the historic scene, on which the light streamed grandly through the stained glass windows, tipping the cornices, paintings, and regal coats of arms with long arrows of gold, and impressing even the reporters in the gallery with the occasional beauty of things human.

It was two o'clock when the Lord Chancellor gave the assemblage Her Majesty's commands to be seated, and half-past two when, Mr. Paramount's speech being read, the Queen retired with flourish of trumpets, Princes, Princesses, Black-Rod, Chamberlain, Comptrollers, and other sovereign persons all outvying one another in the gaudiness of their raiments. By the same occasion Mr. Speaker, newly elect, caught up his robes like petticoats in muddy weather, and shuffled away, with the mace staggering in front of him on a pair of venerable shoulders; and the peers, treading on each other's heels, swept back also to the robing-room to divest themselves of their purple. At this point, the sight was properly over, but the ambassadors, the reporters, and the Peeresses remained, and so did a batch of faithful Commons, who stuck fast, like shell-fish to the bar, whispering that they wanted to hear the speeches on the Address—and especially Lord Mayrose's. There is not generally such wishfulness as this regarding the speeches of young Peers, but thanks to feminine influence, this was an exceptional case, and Mayrose's name was somehow in every mouth. When ladies take to sounding a man's trumpet—an instrument which by the way, a man had best sound for himself in these our times, if he wants to be heard afar—then the crowd which hurries up is like the gathering of the clans. Few of the visitors then in the House of Lords had known Mayrose a month before, or wanted to know him; but they knew the three Countesses of Rosemary, Beaujolais and Coralmere, whose social fiat was as immutable as the laws which went to work on Daniel; and they also knew the ladies of the great houses of Drone, Keane Forester and Rodent Midge, who had been celebrating the young Peer's graces, wit, and genius—ladies seldom hesitate for a qualificative more or less—and never had popular actor or actress a more determined *claque* than that which now mustered to witness Mayrose's first performance. Mayrose was conscious that there was something histrionic in the whole affair, and possibly felt a trifle sheepish as he buttoned his white gloves op-

posited the glass in the robing-room and took a final survey of himself to see that his blue and silver uniform was creaseless. That the small aspects of history may not be overlooked, let it be stated that he feared his moustache tips were too much waxed, and a hesitation possessed him as to whether he should keep his helmet in his hands whilst speaking, or lay it on the bench. However, the genuine heartiness of old Eton and University friends helped in a great measure to steady him and soothe his distractions. Outstretched hands stopped him in the painted lobbies, patted him on the back, and hailed him everywhere with words so frank and cheerful that they seemed to clear the air around him. Lord Hornette said to him kindly, "Well, Mayrose, you are to step ahead of us all to-day!" and Dolly Drone, hastening up from the dining-room where he had been refreshing himself with Stilton and bottled beer whilst the Queen was desiring his attendance, wrung his fingers and exclaimed, "By jove, old man, all the women will be throwing you their handkerchiefs if you dont mind!"

If nothing but a compliment of the most proper kind had been implied in the throwing of the handkerchiefs, the ladies might probably have gone this length with pleasure, for Mayrose's entry seemed to occasion them general and lively satisfaction, which they testified by bringing not a few opera-glasses to bear on him. It was but natural that he should have been careful to have his uniform well made; and its sober tint and soldierly facings gave him much the look of a Prussian officer as he walked to his seat with his helmet under his arm and his sword slung up and quietly clinking.

At a glance he noticed that Lady Rosemary, Zellie, and Violet were in the House, and as there were some minutes more to be passed before the Lord Chancellor installed himself on the woolsack, he left his seat to talk with his friends. But he could not exchange more than a shake of the hand with either Zellie or Violet, who were nestling on the Peers' benches, for Peeresses were leaning towards him in all directions claiming bows and recognition, so that for a few moments the chattering and musical laughter of their ladyships rose above the modulation usual in that House, and made the two clerks on a cross bench smile grimly under their new powdered wigs. If it can be questioned whether the dignity of Senatorial proceedings is enhanced by ladies' assistance, there is little doubt that the joviality of the proceedings is so, and Mayrose truly liked this light introduction to graver business. But everything has an end, and by the time the favoured Viscount had bandied trifles enough to make him think he was in a drawing-room or in the slips of a private stage just before the acting of a charade, the Peers had flocked in by twos and threes till the number of them exceeded three hundred. Hereon Lady Coralmere, bending over him till one of the white feathers in her hair almost kissed his brow, whispered that she had never seen such a full House as this congregated in his honour; and it was with this assurance chiming its melody in his ears that Mayrose threaded his way back to his bench just as the Chancellor was effecting his imposing march up the House. On taking his seat Mayrose was attracted by a black kid hand waved affably to him over the bar, and he perceived it was that of Sir Ham Pennywoddle, who had lately taken oath never to conspire against his Sovereign or to interfere with the Act of Settlement—an Act, of which he mentioned, he had then heard for the first time. Not to have acknowledged Knight's courtesy, or to have done so with coldness, would have looked so conceited under the circumstances, besides Lady Rosemary's gaze was on him, so Mayrose nodded with a smile and received an approving glance from his monarchess.

But now the lull of a House full packed occurred of a sudden, as if some one had said, "Let us pray!" Sons of Peers were grouped round the steps of the throne, and the diplomatic gallery seemed to be more crowded than it was before. The French Ambassador had put his double eye-glass over the bridge of his nose, and the American Minister, too grand a being for uniform, had remitted to his pockets the plum-colored gloves he had bought for the eye of majesty. The tinted windows continued to bathe the scene with soft blue and red light, and excepting the throne and the two seats beside it, not a sitting-place in the House was vacant. All eyes converged towards Mayrose, the Lord Chancellor bent his head towards him, conveying a half-wink, and with statesmen below him, statesmen opposite,

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and nobles pressed round him everywhere, Mayrose stood up and in a clear voice said, "My lords, I have the honour to move an humble address in reply to Her Majesty's gracious speech."

It was an excellent speech; but if any one feels anxious to read the rest of it, let him refer to the papers of that date, and peruse also the leading articles on the debate. With a unanimous and polite voice the London journals declared on the morrow that a speaker of unusual promise had arisen in the Upper House, and complimented Mr. Paramount on his acquisition. But the correspondents of provincial journals, who enjoy a greater latitude in the way of descriptive writing, went further than this, and nothing could be more lyrical than their eulogies over the remarkable delivery, the blue tunic, the cogent rhetoric, and the glinting brass helmet of the young speaker. Nor were any of these praises excessive. The speech did not sound, except for the modesty of its exordium, like the first effort of a young performer. It was lucid, earnest, sensible, and bold—the discourse of a highly trained scholar and gentleman, who spoke from a well-stocked mind, and was in no danger of emitting nonsense. As to the delivery, Mayrose had served an apprenticeship in oratory at the Cambridge Union, and he may have remembered the example of that self-possessed village priest who, being asked how it was that, preaching one day before a bench of cardinals, he had been in no wise abashed, answered, "I consider my congregations as so many cabbages, and red cabbages for a change makes no difference;" but besides all this—though the provincial correspondents could not be aware of this fact nor of its influence on the speech—Zellie was there: and what orator has not spoken the better for such a stimulating presence as this? As he warmed to his work, Mayrose felt that Zellie's eyes were riveted on him, and the desire to show her that he was not a man who yielded on all points to Lord Hornette must have had something to do with strengthening his voice and making him utter things which evoked cheer upon cheer, not only from his own side of the House but from the Opposition party—who gave him the generous encouragement as much from surprise as from admiration. The speech was, indeed, a surprise from first to last. There was the noble lord who wore gaiters of a past age, and had never heard anything like it, and the noble lord who had made an acoustic horn of his hand and thought it astonishing, and the noble lord who habitually dosed during the solemnities, and could not explain why it was he remained awake now. Towards the close Mayrose strayed from the actual topics of the address to general remarks on the policy of his party and on that of the party who had been turned out (here the Opposition cheers were a trifle fainter), but there never was a wildness in his utterance, never a fault in taste or judgment, what hopeful things he had to say he said with feeling, and his criticisms struck the harder as they were temperate and respectful. The speech concluded at the end of an hour of sustained attention, not in loud and prolonged cheers, for their lordships indulge in few such, but in cheers very hearty, and a universal hum of appreciative conversation.

At the same time the personages in the diplomatic gallery turned about and compared impressions.

"C'est un grand pays qui produit de telle jeunes gens," remarked the French ambassador, shutting up his glasses and addressing his American colleague.

"L'Angleterre ne produise pas boccoc de ces joun gens," answered the American in an oracular way.

"Je n'ai pas compris un seul mot de ce qu'il a dit, mais il a une tete bien sympathique," opined a pretty Ambassador, preparing to go away and Tung-Inye-Toheck of the Chinese mission pulled the brocade skirt of a brother attache and appeared to say that the words of the young Mandarin below must have been inspired direct by Kung-Seen the pole of light, whom we English call Confucius.

But whilst these things were being spoken in the gallery, Colonel Dandelion, the "whip," who had stood watchful behind the bar during the whole oration, was in despair and would have torn out bunches of his hair had he had any to spare. "It's a positive ruin he shouldn't be in the Commons, he's just the man we want," observed this knowing politician, ruefully, and hurried away to bear the tidings to Mr. Paramount.

This tribute ; that of Mr. Paramount himself, who bye-and-by made a point of congratulating him ; that of two-thirds of the Peers in the House [who followed him out when the much eclipsed Seconder had had his say ; that of Sir Ham Pennywoddle, who caught him by the hand in the sight of all mankind and claimed to be his disciple—all these should have been trophies to move any man to pride ; but like many a gladiator or matador who has seen but one face among the thousands acclaiming him, so Mayrose cared but for one tribute of the many he received a deep, rapid look with a tear in it, which came from Zellie.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIOLET'S BALM.

Zellie had indeed been listening in wrapt attention to Mayrose's maiden speech. With eyes glistening and lips half-parted in excitement, she had drunk in every word ; and the cheers which exploded round her struck echoes in her heart under the form of great throbs which were almost audible to her sister. Violet had quick wits, and we may be sure that she had passed a considerable number of minutes since the day of the King's Chase run in putting two and two together. Zellie's agitation, Mayrose's constrained manner and needless departure from Elmwood, were factors in a quotient very simple to read ; but Violet's reading, though a natural one, was at variance with the truth. Seeing no reason why Mayrose should not propose to Zellie, and be married on the first convenient date, she supposed that Zellie's evident love for him was not returned ; and this made her indignant. The crime of insensibility is the greatest which a man can commit in woman's eyes, and if Mayrose had been composed enough to observe Violet, he might have noticed a pronounced shade of coldness in her mien as she shook hands with him before his speech.

This coldness was also expressed in her ride home with her father and mother. Whilst the Lord Keeper of the Waste Papers was enthusiastic in praise of " Freddy's great hit"—that is, as enthusiastic as his temperate soul allowed him to be—and whilst Lady Rosemary chimed in with admiring monosyllables, Violet was pleased to see nothing uncommon in the speech. Lord Hornette had spoken quite as well, said she, a little rebelliously, at a certain agricultural dinner, and had besides contrived to make people laugh, which was always an essential in these cases ; and then she did not like an Englishman to dress himself up in a blue tunic when he had only political remarks to offer. Now eloquence is a great charmer of women, and any feminine jury of twelve would have put Vio' t out of court. Lord Rosemary did so on the spot. " For it was really a good speech, Vie," ejaculated he, as if he were judging claret. " What I liked about it was its Oxford flavour. Cambridge gen' rally sends us argumentative men."

" And it was in such perfect taste," observed Lady Rosemary, but without showing surprise at Violet's criticisms, for she had frequently remarked of late that Violet spoke impatiently of her old playmate.

" I don't say it was a bad speech, but the Lords cheered as if they had never heard a sensible thing before," said tenacious Violet.

" It would have been much more cheered in the House of Commons," replied the sunny Lord Keeper, reflectively. " Ten years in the other House would have brought Freddy to the top of the tree."

" He will succeed well as it is," remarked Lady Rosemary, with hopefulness.

" Oh, yes, provided he makes a rich marriage," assented the Lord Keeper, airily. " If poor Coralmere were gone I think Freddy would have a fine chance. Beaujolais whispered to me to look what a fuss Lady Coralmere was making all through the sitting."

" How can Lord Beaujolais say such things, my dear?" answered the Countess, in a deprecating tone.

" Yes, of course, my dear—I beg pardon," apologised the Lord Keeper. " But then there's Miss Pennywoddle, or any other person of good looks and dower.

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Freddy must find some one before the season is over to give dinners for him in that big house."

"I think it's very mean of men to care so much about dining, papa," exclaimed Violet, with flashes in her blue eyes.

"Well, miss, if you had a few brothers and I had nothing to divide between you and Zell, you might be anxious too about the dinner side of life," laughed the Earl. And in all that his Lordship sinned not, for he was aware of no cause or impediment why Freddy's matrimonial or prandial prospects should not be discussed as freely as any country cousin's.

But the while Zellie glanced out of the window at the passing cabs and crowds, at the newsboys selling evening copies of the papers with Her Majesty's gracious Speech, at the City tide of omnibusses flooding westward to dinner and tea, and she said nothing. Once or twice, indeed, when Violet was assaulting Mayrose's success with her little pin thrusts, the blood mantled in pink waves to Zellie's cheeks, and her lips slightly quivered; but she showed no other sign of hearing what was said, and so Violet babbled on guilelessly not suspecting that she was a cause of pain. But she was soon to learn what she had done. The sisters had rooms adjoining each other, and on this particular evening the maid whom they shared in common was to dress them for a dinner at the Duke of Bumblebeigh's; but instead of ringing for this attendant immediately on arriving home, Violet came into Zellie's room, as her custom was, for half-an-hour's talk and for some tea. A tiny copper kettle stood on the grate bracket, hissing its steam into the room, and a tea-service in Sevres china was set on a small tea table, with its cream jug, plate of cakes, and rolled wafers of bread and butter all ready. Zellie and Violet loved to make their tea themselves, without servants' help, and this half-hour they spent nibbling at those wafers of bread and butter, and chatting over the queer things or people they had seen during the day, was always a cosy one. This time, however, when Violet returned from her own room into Zellie's, after taking off her dress and putting on a marvellously cosy *peignoir*, Zellie said, impatiently, with her lips set, "Please take your tea into your own room, Violet. I want to be alone."

Violet stood surprised at the doorway, and with both hands in her hair, which she had begun to let down. "Why, what's the matter?" she asked.

"I want to be alone," repeated Zellie, in a tone as peevish as her gentle voice could assume. She was still dressed, and was standing opposite her toilet glass drawing off her gloves, and throwing them on the table. That glass reflected a very pretty, but troubled face, with a flush of stung pride that fevered her whole frame; and Violet quailed a little at it.

"I won't go, Zellie, till you tell me what I've done to make you cross," she answered ruefully, with a lock of hair falling over her eyes, and so saying, she softly closed the door and stole in.

Then Zellie turned upon her, as the best of girls will when wounded by their younger sisters. No dove could have been milder than Zellie, and no diamond was purer than her childlike heart; but even doves will turn and diamonds cut.

"Why, what have I done that you should wish to tease me and make me unhappy?" she broke out, unclasping one of her bracelets with petulant force. "You've been doing it for days—you know you have!"

"I tease you!" echoed poor Violet, letting a whole cascade of locks fall over her eyes in her amazement.

"Yes, teasing me, and acting as no sister who loved me would have done; and then you say your prayers at night!" faltered unreasonable Zellie, tearing rather than unlocking the other trinkets off her white wrists.

"I didn't think you would ever speak to me so unkindly as that," pouted Violet, picking at the frill of her *peignoir* with troubled fingers, and looking as if she were ready to cry; "and if it's because I spoke about that speech, I wish there had been no speech," said Violet, feelingly.

"I call it wicked and unsisterly," was Zellie's pitiless answer, as she turned her back on Violet and made as if she would cut short all discussion. But in that movement Violet saw that some tears were welling out of her sister's eyes, and this

disarmed her. She followed Zellie with quick forgiving steps, twined an arm round her neck and kissed her.

"Don't call me unsisterly, Zellie. I was angry with Freddy, because it's hard to be patient with a man who looks so pleased with himself when—when—in fact, dear, I knew you were miserable."

She would perhaps have been wiser in avoiding this subject, for there are topics too delicate for allusion even between sisters. But Zellie and Violet had always been as one, having no secrets from each other—before this one had arisen—and to have gone back to her room, leaving Zellie to become good-tempered again at her leisure, was more than Violet would have the heart to do. This was not the first symptom of Zellie's unhappiness either; and Violet much wished to be rid of the load that was oppressing them both, or at least to bear her share of it. So it was with an air of protection as well as loving repentance for any sorrow she might have occasioned that she put her arms round Zellie and kissed her, once, twice, most tenderly. Then Zellie too forgave.

"You mustn't mind me, Vie," she murmured, not being able to withstand those kisses. "What I said was cruel and foolish—I know it; but I thought you were teasing me."

"I didn't mean to tease you, dear; but come and sit down; tea will do you good; and we'll talk," said Violet, at the same time beginning to unhook her sister's dress; and it needed but a few touches of her deft fingers to robe Zellie in a drapery like her own and to set her in a low easy-chair near the fire. Every woman is at heart a nurse would be a truer proverb than another which begins similarly, for after Violet had taken up the little copper kettle and poured its steaming floods on to the leaves whose aroma soon filled the room, and after she had knelt down on the hearthrug at Zellie's feet with the plate of bread and butter in her hands to give herself a countenance, what intuitive wisdom of womanhood was it that made her divine the one right balm for Zellie's sufferings?

"I was out of patience with Freddy, Zell, but do you know I think he is very fond of you, dear," said she, with slow archness, and pushing one of the wafers towards the edge of the plate, as if this were the particular one, and not any of the others, which she wished Zellie to take. "It's easy to see what a man thinks; and there are some men who fancy one doesn't know what's in their thoughts, but they're mistaken. I guessed it all along by Freddy's voice and by his eyes when he imagined nobody was watching him; but then I was angry with him because he didn't speak his mind"—and was it part of the prescription for the use of the balm that Violet should keep her eyes on the ground so as not to perceive Zellie blushing?

"Then I couldn't bear to see you miserable," added Violet. "If a man made you unhappy ever so little, I would speak as crossly of him as I could, because he would deserve it."

"I couldn't bear to see you—angry," replied Zellie, rather tremulously, in a voice as low as her sister's. "All that Fred—Lord Mayrose said was so noble that it seemed hard-hearted of you. Even papa was touched."

"Yes; but a man should not know only how to speak to lords," proceeded Violet, still pushing the wafer forward with the smallest of her fingers. "He should be able to speak to *us*—that's what I was saying to myself. But I expect he's afraid."

"Afraid of what?" asked Zellie, naively; and just then the wafer of bread and butter found its way on to the plate in her lap, and immediately afterwards a cup of tea came into her hands, because Violet dumbly insisted on it.

"Well, afraid of money," answered Violet, catering now for herself, and shaking the locks out of her eyes. "There is always something of that sort to make everyone wretched. It seems we are rich and he is not—that may frighten him—men are so odd! Then it may be Lord Hornette"—and again Violet kept her eyes away from her sister as she rose and filled her own cup.

"Lord Hornette!" ejaculated Zellie, nervously, with an inflection of mingled dread and dislike.

"You know, dear, he was always showing himself polite to you before Freddy came back, and people may have talked about it," observed Violet wisely.

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"But I never made Lord Hornette any promises, Violet—never!"

"Supposing, though, Zellie"—and this time Violet looked on the ground again, but drew nearer to her sister—"supposing Lord Hornette asked you for a promise?"

"Oh, Violet! I could never make him a promise—not if, if I died for it! Never!" And there must have been vehement emphasis in this answer, for Violet was on her knees again in an instant, making Zellie a necklace with her arms, and whispering, "But, then, Zellie, we have only to wait a little and everything will come right. Freddy will take heart and speak—men always speak after they have behaved aggravatingly for a time. And promise never to think I am teasing you, eh? Try and be like you were before all this—before that day with the hounds."

"I thought he was killed when he fell from his horse," was Zellie's scarcely audible answer—in audible because Violet's lips crept up to hers as she made it.

But these scenes of emotion are never allowed to last long, and it was this confidential moment which Miss Stitchett, the maid, selected for scratching at the door and remarking that it was time for their ladyships to dress. The day was waning in the square outside; the lampmen were dotting their red stars about Belgravia; and in Zellie's room the flicker of the fire threw fitful shadows over the group of the two sisters nestling cheek to cheek. They would have both loved to nestle so for some time longer, but at the maid's intrusion Violet rose, and stretched her arms above her head, with a well-feigned little yawn of laziness and languor; then stooping to breathe another parting whisper of good hope she sought her own room and surrendered herself to Miss Stitchett's comb, and ivory-backed brushes.

But the curious part of this episode has yet to be told, for, whilst inventing arguments to plead in favour of Mayrose's attachment, devotion, and modesty, Violet had ended by convincing herself—a phenomenon of which lawyers may have some experience. Or since we have compared Violet's sisterly ministrations to a balm, it was as if she had culled ingredients at haphazard, and was now surprised at their real worth and efficacy. So long as she had judged Mayrose on her own account, she had heaped up accusations against him, taxing him with callousness of a rare order for not instantaneously requiting the love that was being lavished on him; but in taking his part for Zellie's sake it had occurred to her that money and Lord Hornette—the two somehow joined—might indeed be the causes of his reserve.

All this was pondered over whilst Miss Stitchett was making her beautiful for Bumblebeigh House, with a coiffure copied from a diagram by that great capillary artist, Mr. Friesemeche, of Paris, and with a dress trimmed with rows and little bunches of those blue iridescent feathers taken from the throats of peacocks—a dazzling conception of that other great Parisian, Mr. Girth. Still, when she was ready for conquest, and was fastening on the sapphire ornaments—bracelets, necklace, and ear-rings—which by Mr. Girth's written orders were to be worn "profusely," Violet could not help exclaiming—

"After all, though Freddy is very provoking and silly, papa and mamma love him—I love him—everybody loves him. He has only to come and say that he loves Zellie and we should all be happy, everyone of us."

And so this prudent little schemer resolved that whenever she met Master Freddy, whether at Bumblebeigh House that night, or elsewhere, she would give him an adroit hint to set him on the track of duty.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRACK OF DUTY.

She did see Freddy at Bumblebeigh House that evening in the rout that followed the Duke's private dinner-party, but the crush of notables was so great that she could not get near him. London had poured out its place-hunting legions, male and feminine, who thronged his Grace's yellow drawing-rooms to smirk before the wives, daughters, and sisters of all the new Cabinet Ministers; and Mayrose

having being borne into a corner by the tide, remained there like a stranded waif, half a dozen of the Drone, Rodent Midge, and Keane Forester ladies treating him like lawful jetsam, and pulling him figuratively to pieces. It was several days before Violet fairly saw Mayrose again to speak to, and by that time he had truly added a cubit to his stature. He was gazetted Under-Secretary for the Australian Colonies; and moreover he was somebody, which an Under-Secretary need not necessarily be. The weekly papers, following in the train of the dailies, had caught up his speech and analysed it as a remarkable—some said threatening—production, the political programme of a new party; and hereat such of the dailies as were antagonistic to Mr. Paramount's men, and felt disgusted at having bestowed praise on somebody who turned out to have a programme, wrote new leaders recanting their previous ones, and sneered politely at the speech, warning the orator against bump-tiousness. This was no mean triumph. Perhaps though, the most satisfactory tribute was that of a high-class review, which in the hoity-toity style of philosophy familiar to most of us, speculated on the functions of the peers in the abstract and on their utility in general. The writer deplored the position of the young peer of *nous* and the sense of wasted power which must oppress him at finding himself in a gerusian assembly, fated by the conditions of its essence to be abortive, bringing forth *magno jam conatu magnus rugas*. All this high-class writing filled a column, and was by the Rev. Nonus Nines.

So Mayrose was, beyond remission, a public servant. He drew a salary of fifteen hundred a year, had patronage to dispose of, and ruled Australia under the guidance of Lord Balbie Drone—so nick-named from a slight impediment in his speech, which enabled him to say but one half of what he desired, and therefore lent an air of preternatural sapience to the half that was left unsaid. Possibly these unsaid halves had been the making of Lord Balbie Drone. Judging him by his countenance one was moved to credit him with a depth of purpose unfathomable, for it might be truly said of him as of a certain Chancellor, that nobody was ever so wise as Lord Balbie looked. He came to the office every morning with a long umbrella under his arm, and read the *Times*; and when he had done that he read some other paper. The cutting of the leaves of a Blue book with an ebony paper knife brought him to the hour when he generally took a brown-bread biscuit and a glass of sherry, after which he was sufficiently refreshed to vouchsafe as many signatures as the Permanent Under-Secretary, Mr. Kean-Midge, requested of him. A gentleman of polished humility, he gave Mayrose no trouble of any sort or kind, and was glad—almost grateful—when the latter would come in to help him eat the brown-bread biscuits, and agree with him that sherry was not what it used to be in former years. Towards three, with the consciousness of duty discharged sitting comfortably on him, his lordship would set out for the House of Commons on foot, going the longest way because he made it a principle to take exercise, and, on another principle, he contrived to leave the house early and never to return to it unless absolutely wanted, because he doubted whether night air was good for the lungs. Lord Balbie's hats were not well brushed, nor did his boots fit him, but there was a knowingly politic aspect on them which singled them out from the hats and boots of the vulgar.

Now it was at Lord Balbie's house that Violet met Mayrose again, for the Duke of Bumblebeigh's brother had married a rich heiress of one of the governing houses—the Lady Isabella Keane-Forester, and her ladyship was hospitable in bringing useful and pleasant people together. Mayrose had been speedily invited there, and it had required him no time to see that he stood in Lady Bella's agreeable wide-awake eyes as a favoured subaltern does towards the wife of his colonel. Lady Bella loved to patronize young men, to draw them out, show them and give them advice. She was always richly covered—it could scarcely be styled "dressing," for she was of luxuriant proportions, and a little amiss in her taste for colours; she was also humourously bluff, and the club called her privately Belladonna, not because of the beauty she may have once claimed, but because of her conversation, which, like belladonna, was apt to make the pupils of one's eyes dilate.

"So you are in the office now," she said to Mayrose, after the latter had fared sumptuously at her board, and was standing before her in the drawing-room during

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the few minutes that precede the incursion of late guests invited to the "assembly." "You have an excellent place. I knew poor Sir Job Humdrombe, who held it years ago, before I was married; his wife ran away with her footman."

"Dear me!" said Mayrose, with sympathy.

"Yes, it's a painful subject, and I never allude to it; but those Humdrombes have always been unfortunate," continued her ladyship, fanning herself. "There was Mr. Dulleigh Humdrombe, who became Lord Tweedledee, and people always said he got his peerage to console him for his wife having gone off to Nice with Count Vaudeville of the French Embassy. He threatened to poison himself."

"I hope he thought better of it," was Mayrose's considerate remark.

"Yes, his valet tied him up with the bed curtains and cried for the police, so that it very nearly got into the papers. These things are all good to know, but not to be talked about; in fact I often wonder myself how it is that scandals get circulated and remembered as they do. But now tell me," broke off Lady Bella, with a most proper sigh, "you have half the patronage of the office to dispose of?"

"A part of it, I believe," answered Mayrose. "Lord Albert has been kind enough to hand me over some of the appointments."

"Oh, it's the custom, and there's no kindness in it," exclaimed her ladyship, frankly. "Is there not a judgeship in the Grogsgate Islands vacant now?"

"Yes, and five dozen applicants for it. I was reading the testimonials before dinner," laughed the new Under-Secretary.

"Dear me! I wouldn't read testimonials if I were you," exclaimed Lady Belladonna, with an engaging shrug, and a matronly look of indulgence. "If you have not yet appointed anybody, I will tell you of a capital person; he is a sort of relative of mine, so I can depend upon him—young Staulker Rodent, who has been at the bar some years. He took the highest honours at Oxford, I believe—what they call a pass-degree."

"I am sure I shall be very happy to recommend Mr. Rodent," bowed Mayrose, a little bewildered; and just as his first piece of patronage had thus been whipped skilfully out of his hands and beyond the reach of the five score of gentlemen who had sent in testimonials, the assembly guests began to flow in. This enabled him to retreat and accost his chief, who forthwith introduced him to various people presumably belonging to the testimonial order of creation, for they talked of the Australian Archipelago as if they all wanted to be sent there by the next boat, and as if Mayrose would oblige them particularly in assisting their embarkation. Not much diverted by all this, the Under-Secretary meditated whether he could not glide away unobserved and go home to deal with some business of the office, which seemed to him to require special attention, and he had reached an outer room on his way to exit when he felt the tap of a fan on his arm, and turning round was confronted by Violet—all silk, feathers and flowers.

"Ah, it's you, Violet!" he said, with a brightening up of his features, which had been weary a minute before, and held out his hand, well pleased.

"I suppose you are become too grand to talk to any one now," replied Violet, with a little pout; "you passed Zellie and me just now without even looking at us."

"The gas or those twinkling eyes of yours must have blinded me," he smiled, apologetically. "But how is Zellie?" And this he said in a tone of simulated quietude as if he were alluding to a very distant person indeed.

"Zellie is very well," answered Violet, quite catching the accent of the question, and taking his arm coldly out of protest at it. "You would not have occasion to ask if you came to see us more often."

"I have been to see Lady Rosemary twice this week," pleaded Mayrose.

"Yes, when Zellie and I were out," retorted Violet, affecting to fasten a button of her glove.

"I wished both times you had been in," said the Under-Secretary for Australia.

"Yes, a man is always wishing things which cost him no trouble," replied Violet severely, as she beat down her coruscating skirt; but now they had reached the confines of the drawing-room, where a distinguished vocalist with a butter-coloured head had just been invited, at his own ill-concealed desire, to sit down at the piano

and sing British ballads. So the room was hushed, and Mayrose led Violet in silence to a seat whilst the gifted being poured out his warble :—

"You're loo-o-o-o-king as bright as the mo-o-o-rn, lov'.
You're loo-o-o-o-king as bright as the day-ay-ay,
But whilst on your cha-a-a-arms I'm dila-a-a-ting,
You're stea-ea-ealing my poo-o-o-or hea-eart away-ay-ay!"

Lord Balbie Drone, who loved music as he did fresh air in dry weather, was enjoying this melody with his eyes shut; and his chin on his waistcoat in a corner. Everybody else was serious, not to say sad. Mayrose could not discover Zellie, perhaps because she was concealed from him by numbers of the sad people in large chignons sitting down, and by others perhaps sadder, in dress coats, standing up. So he reverted to Violet, who had been examining him out of the corners of her eyes with a look of injured dignity, as if there could be no forgiveness on her part unless there was entire submissiveness and contrition on his. Not guessing, however, what was in her mind, and not knowing consequently, what he had to be contrite at, Mayrose seemed amused at her serious face—a recollection of old days when she used to grow angry with him if he stayed over his books instead of coming out to fish, and play sulks with him during an afternoon. Accordingly during the second stanza of the ballad, when the audience are privileged to resume their conversation in whispers, under pretext of admiring the music, he stooped and said: "What a wilful little thing you are, Violet; just fancy being offended with me because I didn't know when you would be out!"

"You know we always ride in the Park from twelve till two," responded Violet, as though all the world were aware of this thing.

"From twelve till two?"

"Yes, papa goes with us when he can, and when he can't we ride alone with the groom—Zellie and I. Do you ride?" added Violet demurely.

"I have no hack for the present," said Mayrose, reflecting of a sudden how much a saddle-horse might add to the comfort of life.

"Well, if you bought a horse and rode into the Park with it, I should always be glad to see you," observed Violet, pretending to look at a picture on the wall, "and—so would Zellie."

This last word was low uttered, and was moreover half drowned in the noise of the ballad, for the butter-coloured tenor was proceeding on his tuneful way:

"You're smi-i-i-ling, and that's a goo-o-o-od sign, lov',
Say ye-e-e-s, and you'll ne-e-e-ver repe-e-ent;
Or if you wou-ou-ould ra-a-ther be si-i-i-lent,
Your si-i-i-lence I'll take fo-o-o-or conse-e-e-ent!"

"Beautiful voice," said Mayrose, gravely, when the next stanza and the ballad with it had been brought to a conclusion amidst sincere applause; and now, in the general disturbance of the sad people leaving their places and forming new groups, he turned, with Violet's welcome words melting in his heart—for he had heard them, despite the music—and set eyes on Zellie. Lord Hornette was standing beside the sofa where she sat, and it struck him that she appeared much less melancholy than when he had last seen her. Her lips moved to answer everything the Earl said; she even smiled, and there was nothing to show—so far as Mayrose could see—that she was not listening to the compliments of a man she liked or loved. Mayrose had got apart from Violet, for a cohort of moustached men with eighteen-penny bunches in their button-holes, Guardsmen for the most part, had come to flit round her, and he stood a moment uncertain whether he should go away, or approach Zellie under cover of Hornette's presence, and pay her the civility of a greeting. It might look strange and uncouth if he did not, for she might catch sight of his retreating figure. He thought he would go up to her.

But he was still deliberating, when there suddenly broke upon the scene the agitated features of Dolly Drone. This burly personage had evidently been thrown into commotion by something startling, for he made straight towards his brother, ploughing himself a channel through the crowd with a promptitude which nothing

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but the habit of Society prevented from resembling a hustle; then he touched Lord Hornette on the arm, and said a few words in his ear. The Earl started, questioned his brother with excitement, then bowed hurriedly to Zellie, and vanished into another room with Dolly; but the two re-appeared in an instant, the elder brother with an ugly frown and biting his lips, the other labouring behind like a heavy brig in distress. Right towards Mayrose they came, not seeming to perceive him in their haste to reach the door; but as they were about to brush by, Lord Hornette looked up, and his features rapidly cleared.

"Ah, Mayrose, it's just you we were going to look for! It's most lucky you're here. Do come along with us, please; something very unpleasant has happened!"

"What is it?" asked Mayrose, astonished, as he allowed himself to be led by Lord Hornette into the tea-room. Here they surprised the vocalist with the butter-colored head rewarding himself for his late efforts with a cup of extremely hot coffee. He appeared to think at first that this deputation of noblemen had come to congratulate him, but discovering his error just as he was preparing to smile, he slunk away as if he had been caught singing out of tune.

"Look here—read this!" explained the Earl, taking a newspaper from his brother and tearing it open. "Wasn't I right to tell you how people talk about the slightest thing! It's most awkward and insolent—see here," and he handed Mayrose the sheet, scoring the paragraph with his glove.

It was a late edition of the *Muffin Bell*, a London evening paper of repute, and Mayrose read this:

"MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.—Our Hiveborough correspondent telegraphs that a match has been arranged between Viscount Mayrose, the new Under-Secretary to Australia, and Lady Azalea Carol, eldest daughter of the Earl of Rosemary, K.G., Lord Keeper."

It would have been difficult to say what Mayrose felt as he scanned these lines. Certain it is that his pulses throbbed quick, and that his face twice changed color before Lord Hornette's dry, irritated voice jarred on him, crying, "You see, if it's not stopped in time the paragraph will be reprinted in all the morning papers. But it's only eleven, and I'm sure you won't mind going the round of all the newspaper offices and the press agencies to give this thing a flat denial. We'll go with you, but you are the only man who can speak authoritatively in the affair."

"The only man," echoed Dolly Drone, panting.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CONTRADICTION.

If this newspaper paragraph had appeared but a few days later! If Mayrose could have met Zellie and Violet but once alone in the Park, or if that evening at Lady Belladonna's he had talked but half as long with Zellie as he had done with Violet, there would have been no need for him then to have obeyed Lord Hornette, and spent a night scouring the press offices. One word from Zellie, one unmistakable glance, would have given him heart to speak out, and if Zellie had but smiled in listening to him, there would have been an end of all perplexities, so that he might have said to Lord Hornette, "Let the paragraph stand." The Earl would have quarreled with him, of course; but, after all, the happiness of his life and that of Zellie were of more account to him than Lord Hornette's good pleasure. As it was, however, nothing had occurred between Zellie and himself to alter the position of which Lord Hornette had taken advantage at Elmwood. Lady Rosemary had said nothing which could make Mayrose suppose that Hornette had been guilty of misrepresentation; Zellie's manner in the House of Lords could by no means be construed into anything more than an indication of friendly admiration and goodwill—had he not seen her that very night chatting most amicably with Hornette!—and, in sum, he was still bound by the solemn promise he had given to the Earl. Besides, the contradiction of the paragraph was not a thing that could be postponed until Mayrose had time to feel his ground anew. Even as he stood in that tea-room fingering the newspaper confusedly, the compositors of the morning

journals might be setting-up the announcement in type, and every moment lost was of the utmost importance from the rightful suitor's point of view.

"You see the false news will be repeated all over the country to-morrow if we hesitate," repeated the Earl, impatiently, and with a testy gesture, as he watched Mayrose's blank face.

"Yes, I will come with you," said Mayrose, waking up, and they went down stairs together, out among the servants and linkmen, and the flare of carriage-lamps on the pavement. Mayrose's brougham was called; Lord Hornette sprang into it, but just as Dolly Drone was going to do the same his brother stopped him, "Suppose you go off to the Palæstra, Doll, and hunt up Nines. He's thick with all the papers, and you two can go to three of the offices whilst we call at the others," and the Earl hurriedly mentioned the newspapers which he and Mayrose would visit.

Accordingly Dolly Drone drove off obediently to that stronghold of literary Philistinism, the Palæstra Club, to disturb the Rev. Nonus Nines, whilst Mayrose and his companion sped away eastward as fast as clashing wheels could carry them. They crossed cabs jolting home with their family freights from the play-houses; men with the collars of their great coats up, striding quickly to their lodgings and letting themselves in stealthily with their latch-keys; policemen putting their lantern to keyholes and trying to see that doors and area-gates were safely locked. They passed clubs with their blinds down and huge shadows of men reading colossal newspapers, and maybe conning over that very insertion about the "marriage in high life;" then oyster-shops aflame with gas, red with their trophies of shell-fish, and noisy with cheap revelry; their carriage bumped over the ill-crushed stones of the macadam, and passed again loud music halls, tawdry divans, and riotous gin-palaces, pouring out their contingents of tired feasters; and here and there bedizened forms of women hanging about street corners, and sorry fellows tottering towards the latches of these decoyers with the enchanted leer of bad spirits on them. It was the hour of the night when Vice puts on her rouge and frippery over half a dozen acres of London ground, and succeeds in looking as hideous as is natural amidst a people who take so joylessly to her worship as we English do. For English Vice, with her forced jests and sham-faced looks, has small affinity with her frolicsome sisters of Paris, Vienna, and Florence, or even with that brawling relative of hers who carouses in New York. We are a dull people, who are not seen with advantage away from our home firesides. So, passing through these vicious precincts, the two young men rolled up the half-empty Strand towards the purer abodes where men lose their hair and sleep by preaching at vices, social or political, to the tune of groaning steam presses. At any other time it might have amused them both to brush their way up the wooden staircases of these dwellings, odorous with ink and damp paper, and to see virtuous Literature measuring out her sermons by the column of eight words to a line. The printer's devils with faces besmudged; the reporters hugging "flimsy" against their thread-bare bosoms; the husky gentlemen who have hurried with the first news of murders just committed, conflagrations raging, or burglaries unpublished; those owl-like birds of night, the critics, whose dress coat-tails bulge agape with notes on that evening's new drama so enthusiastically applauded; the small fry who indite paragraphs, the bigger fry who pen leaders, and the editors, chief or sub., whose task it is to reduce the mass of phrasing into palatable pulp—all these persons are worth a midnight's visit, and might afford themes for study to men fresh from the echoes of women's prattle or of drawing-room tenors' minstrelsy. But if Mayrose and Lord Hornette had been old in their experience of the Fourth Estate—or *first* Estate, judging it by its own opinion of itself—they could not have shown more indifference to the sights which met them. Reaching the seedy but illustrious mansion where one of the most potent of the papers put its conscientious beliefs into print, they alighted at the same time as a gentleman from a hansom, presumably one of the conscientious staff, who vanished through the door with his head averted, as if detection would be most grievous to him. They followed this gentleman through the door and handed their cards to a man in shirt sleeves and a paper cap, who had some crumbs of cheese on his lips, and scrambled up a stair-

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case, leaving them in a draught. Literature is ever queerly housed and has strange attendants.

But the cards of a peer and a noble M. P.—the one a member of the Government, the other a future Duke of Bumblebeigh—commanded attention even from an Editor, to whom the great of the earth were as nine-pins. Lord Mayrose might have come from Downing-street with special information about that war in the Cocoa country, and he could not be left in a draught. The man in the paper-cap shambled down and begged their lordships to step up; and they stepped up into the room where the Editor—enthroned behind piles of letters, litters of telegrams, manuscripts in every illegible variety, and on every species of onion peel foreign paper—sat correcting the proof of a leader. He was a notable personage this—the man who, better than any historian past or present, could have written the truth about the age in which he lived, and the man who of all others would have been least tempted to write it. The knowledge he had acquired of this world's affairs would have been enough to muddle most men, but it had not muddled him; he appeared to see clear through it all, and to have reached the pacifying impression that to-day is as yesterday, and the newest events, like old stories which Time delights to tell over and over again like a feeble aged person in his dotage. Dignified but humorous in mien, of manners polite and ministerial, this diplomatist of the Quill—who might have checkmated Talleyrand, and winked at Gortschakoff, if he had thought it worth while—wore a benevolent look which seemed to say that you need not be afraid of unbosoming yourself to him, for that whatever might be your communication he should attach but a secondary importance to it. Lord Hornette, who knew this famous Editor from having dined with him at Bumblebeigh House, shook his hand and accosted him with a deference he would have shown to no other man in England—much less in Ireland—not being a Royal Prince.

"We are really sorry to trespass on you at this busy hour, but something very annoying has appeared in an evening paper," said the Earl, and he forthwith explained what that something was.

"I had seen the paragraph, and we should naturally have quoted it," answered the editor, with a bland look at Mayrose, implying that although these quotations were generally the business of the sub-editors who sat in a lower room, yet an event so important as his lordship's marriage would have been cared for by his own sovereign eye.

"I am inexpressibly surprised at an evening paper being so incautious," proceeded Lord Hornette, in a high falsetto; and he was too fidgetty to accept the seat which the editor offered him.

"It was very incautious," assented the editor, but in a tone as if the prudence of evening newspapers was past praying for. "You would wish the statement denied at once?"

"Yes," said Mayrose, in reply to a second look from the editor, who appeared to scan him with interest as a man who was very young to have already made his mark in the world by a speech, and to be now signalling himself by a wrongly-imputed marriage. Unquestionably he divined that there must be a mystery under all this, which he would discover in due season, and which now accounted for Mayrose being so reserved, whilst Lord Hornette was so excited and loquacious.

"Yes, if you please," repeated Mayrose. "Would you kindly state that the rumour is incorrect?"

"Utterly unfounded and quite unjustifiable," added the Earl, warmly, as if Mayrose's words were very far from emphasising the full gravity of the offence.

But the editor naturally adopted Mayrose's phraseology:—

"I will take care the denial is printed in a conspicuous place," he said, with a smirk, and stooping over his table he wrote with his own august hand this paragraph:—"We are requested to state that the announcement published by an evening contemporary of a projected marriage between Viscount Mayrose and the Lady Azalea Carol, daughter of the Earl of Rosemary, K.G., is incorrect."

Now there is a great difference in print between "incorrect" and "utterly unfounded," and Lord Hornette, who wished to see the garrulous *Muffin Bell* pulverized, thought the contradiction as it stood unduly tame. But reflection doubtless

showed him that the denial of a marriage rumour must be so worded as to convey no idea of irritation—this for the lady's sake as much as for the gentleman's—and so he suffered the above formula to serve as a model to all the other editors whom Mayrose and he bestirred after thanking and quitting the first one. There was not an office they left unvisited, for it occurred to the Earl that if Dolly Drone had been unable to lay hands on the Rev. Nonus Nines he might not possess initiative enough to act on his own responsibility; wherefore all the small hours were spent by them in affronting draughts, sending up cards, being smirked to and furnishing explanations. They saw one editor whose face was like an open daisy, and another in tight clothes who chirruped round like an obsequious sparrow, wonderfully refreshed by their noble company. A third editor in slippers had a harried look, as if he feared that in a leader just then printing he had allowed a contributor to go too far; and a fourth, with red cheek-bones, whose editorial sanctum smelt of smoke, appeared dubious as to whether his young men were going far enough. All these moulders of public opinion and others were seen, and every one was profusely obliging, more particularly those who were opposed to Mr. Paramount's administration, and had been saying acidulated things of Mayrose. One of these was indeed so much moved on receiving the peer's card with that of a friend, that his thoughts travelled straight away to the transatlantic customs of which he was a theoretic admirer, and for once he perhaps blessed himself that he was not plying his free pen under that suggestive banner with the red stripes. However, this one's frozen soul melted apace when he learned that he was being prayed to do a favour, not to render a satisfactory account of words irrevocable, and he bowed his visitors to the landing with every assurance of blame for newspapers which print nuptial announcements with such levity as this *Muffin Bell* had shown. The clocks of St. Clement Dane's and St. Mary-le-Strand were drowsily chiming the third hour past midnight, and the carts of fruit and vegetables were lumbering down the Strand toward Covent Garden, when Mayrose and Hornette came out of the last morning paper office, and met on the threshold Dolly Drone and Mr. Nines, who were just going in. Dolly Drone had not found the reverend writer at the Palæstra, but had awoken him from the sleep of the just in his chambers, and had claimed of him as a friendly service to put on his trousers and come out into the cold. Then the two had gone together to the press agencies to get the contradiction circulated among the provincial journals; after which, it being Thursday night, they had proceeded to the printing offices of the illustrated papers published on Friday, and had luckily succeeded in their mission.

"We were not a minute too soon though," smiled Mr. Nines, who looked dissipated from having been hurried out before he had brushed his hair; "the papers were going to press, and had the quotation as a tit-bit among their latest news. They put on such spurts to outdo each other, that I expected to find your portrait, Mayrose, and Lady Azalea's already on the blocks."

"It's a sheer madness this for printing impertinent remarks about one's private doings," cried Lord Hornette, with the voice of a steel-trap uncoiled. "We'll leave it to you, Nines, to trounce the fellow who first put this lie into print—tell him he ought to be punished, he and his correspondent at Hiveborough. D—the man!"

"He'll be trounced enough without me," submitted Nines, demurely. "When he gets the morning papers he will feel as if half-a-dozen buckets of cold water had been dashed on his head, and he is a bald man too."

"I wish the deuce they were real buckets, and so does Mayrose," gratuitously ejaculated Lord Hornette, buttoning his overcoat tight because of the night air, and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "I suppose we can go and turn in now; if we were in Paris we might find supper somewhere. But, eh, what's this?"

The group were standing on the pavement with the office-lump beating down a red glare on their opera-hats; and opposite them, ogling them as it were from a hoarding, stared a poster which was blue and orange in the day time but had put on grey tints now to harmonize with the general dusk. This poster screamed:—

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THE REPORTER!

Every Morning,
THE REPORTER!

ONE PENNY.

"Why, I'm blessed, here's another of them; they're swarming up like locusts!" growled Hornette, jerking an expletive at the poster as he stepped into the road.

"Oh no, that one won't be out for some days more," explained Mr. Nines. "It's Quintus Dexter's paper. You know Dexter, Mayrose? He and your neighbour Sir Ham Pennywoddle have clubbed their brains together to pour forty-eight daily columns of horrors on us."

"They are very welcome," answered Mayrose, wearily; "but now, as Hornette says, we can go to bed. Shall I put you down anywhere, Nines?"

But Mr. Nines thanked him, saying he would rather trouble Dolly Drone, who was going his way, and so Mayrose rode home alone, but not to bed. Letting himself in with his key, he ascended the staircase of his big, silent house, and knowing his valet Bino would be asleep long ere this—having orders not to sit up for his master after midnight—he did not go towards his bed-chamber, but into a large state drawing-room that occupied all the first floor. It was a strange place to haunt in these dark hours, but to a sleepless man imbued with a Continental love for open air, the long balcony skirting the five windows might seem a good place to lounge on, smoking away melancholy in a waking dream. There would be nothing unusual in a man spending a night in a Parisian balcony, and something might even be made out of the poetry of the proceeding, but it would seem as if poetical acts perpetrated in a city of coal-smoke (though for that matter Paris is smoky enough, too,) lost much of their ideality and even of their good sense. Mayrose, though, cared little for that, and was more concerned about the bleak, ghostly look which his state apartment wore. The small candlestick he had lit at the night lamp in the hall threw a pale flicker on the dull array of chairs and sofas in their Holland covers, on the tall mirrors that reflected the flickering in the form of yellow flashes, on the pictures of departed Mayroses—the men red-coated and wigged for the most part, the women tricked out in white satin, with pointed bodices, and holding small nosegays of chlorotic flowers in their taper fingers. They seemed good bodies as they simpered in the candle light at the room where they themselves had been simpered to and courted during the hey-day of the Mayrose annals; and their descendant could not help wondering whether they, too, had ever been crossed in their love affairs as he had, and if so, why they wore such unconscionably placid faces after it? He softly drew up a blind, and opened one of the windows, letting the moon-light stream in above his head with a gust of cool air that chafed his temples gratefully; then, stepping on to the balcony, he lit a cigar and leaned on the railing, feeling like a man who had played his first rubber in the game of life and lost it.

And there would be no retrieving the loss either. Whether it was a fatality that had separated him from Zellie, a misunderstanding or whatnot, the papers would be spreading it in a few hours among Englishmen all the world over, that Zellie was never to be his wife. Had he acted well or weakly in keeping faith with Hornette was a question past discussion now; the thing was done, and Zellie and he stood wider apart than if one of them were dead. He gazed wistfully into the deserted square below him, with its leafless trees unstirred by a breath of wind, and its houses around all hushed; and he conjured up a last vision of what might have been and what was—the vision of Zellie animating that cheerless room behind him, gladdening the old chambers and passages with the music of her voice, and the light sound of her footfalls, and making of the lifeless, childless house a bright home again. It was a fair idyll that had grown up unawares and must be dispelled now forever, like other dreams that vanish unremembered. And yet not unremembered, for the earth keeps a trace of the flower that has been plucked up, and so does the heart. As the first grey streak of dawn was breaking over the roofs facing him to

the east, Mayrose turned westward in the direction where Zellie must be sleeping and blew a kiss—"God bless you, darling—darling!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"GOOD 'LL COME OF IT."

A few hours later, the contradiction duly figured in all the papers as the several editors had promised, and excited comment over the breakfast-tables of society. Among those who frequented Rosemary House and Bumblebeigh House, and really knew something of both families, it was supposed that the peccant *Muffin Bell* had through editorial inadvertence, or a misprint, inserted Lord Mayrose's name instead of Lord Hornette's, and that a new paragraph would soon announce the betrothal of Lady Azalea Carol to the heir of the Bumblebeighs. This was the version which Dolly Drone and the ladies Drone, in short all the Drone connection, circulated in all the clubs and drawing-rooms throughout the day—not by downright statement but by hints—and indeed it was the only way of accounting for a public denial so plain. It is always a delicate matter to deny the report of a marriage. If the rumor had been merely incorrect as regarded Mayrose, and if Lady Azalea had been engaged to no one else, it would have been quite sufficient to beg the morning papers not to quote the erroneous paragraph, and the denial, if any, should have been confined to the one journal which had first given currency to the error; but, of course, if Lady Azalea were definitely engaged to Lord Hornette, and if the marriage were near, a wide denial was proper. Lord Hornette, who knew, when his first excitement was over, that he had been guilty of singular presumption and bad taste in publishing Lady Azalea's name, without first consulting herself and her parents—was at Rosemary House before nine o'clock in the morning, so that he might see Lord Rosemary, and if possible the Countess, before either of them could have had time to be startled by the papers; and Mayrose arrived shortly after, as in duty bound, to explain his own share in the transaction. To Mayrose no blame whatever could attach. Presuming that Hornette was Zellie's accepted suitor, it had been his clear obligation to do as the Earl had requested—the latter being the best judge of what was due to his future wife. This he had no trouble to explain, and he was more intent on expressing his sincere regrets that his name should have been coupled with Zellie's without any warranty on his part. Lady Rosemary, who had come come down in some agitation at this unlooked for incident, kindly absolved him both in words and in her own mind; but when Mayrose was gone and Lord Hornette remained with the Earl and Countess, it was gravely agreed among them that Zellie must now be spoken to without delay. Lord Rosemary did not seem quite to grasp the bearings of the whole question, though he was conscious that everybody was looking annoyed, and that it was decent for him to appear annoyed too; but Lady Rosemary perceived that by one of his prompt high-handed moves Lord Hornette had made himself master of the situation, and had rendered it almost impossible for Zellie to refuse him. She could not condemn him so severely for this as she might have done had she been judging such conduct in relation to strangers, for a mother must needs forgive a great deal of sharp strategy when it is dictated by a love for her child, and of Lord Hornette's jealous love there could now be no doubt. With a readiness that was not unmanly he begged leave to return at mid-day to propose in form to Zellie, after which, said he, if he were happily accepted, the evening paper which had first talked of the marriage could be asked to print that the substitution of Mayrose's name for his was—as society was being led to infer—a mere typographical blunder. So all would be well that ended well.

This was also the reflection that occurred to Sir Ham Pennywaddle when the paragraph declaring Mayrose's rumoured nuptials to be incorrect reached him at breakfast, sweetening his toast; but the paragraph was not equally welcome to the irresponsible author of the rumour—Mr. Quintus Dexter; for it was none other than that gentlemen who, strolling into the office of the *Muffin Bell*, had given his friend the editor the piece of news, knowing it would be made use of; and in so

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doing he had acted in some sense with good faith. In effect, he believed that the news he bruited was true, but his wish had been father to the belief. He had cogent reason for desiring that the owner of Springfield should disappear from the roll of eligible bachelors, and the contradiction was as unpleasant to him as if some scheme of his had been thwarted. Perhaps, some scheme was being thwarted. Certainly Mr. Dexter would now be obliged to hear the peer's perfections chanted again with a provoking significance by Sir Ham, who had been mournfully silent on this theme since what he termed "that young chap's foolishness" had been made known to him. It was arrant foolishness according to Sir Ham, for a young chap who could net a big dowry to angle for a smaller one, "the more so as I don't believe in Lady Zalea's twenty thousand pounds a year," he had said with peevish solemnity to Mr. Dexter. "Lord Rosemary's property is mostly under entail, and girls don't get entail. I know it, for Lawyer Deedes told me so, and I was particular in asking." Thus had Sir Ham frequently held forth in the growing intimacy which had resulted from the barrister's visit to Penny, and from the consequent deed of partnership between the two for the starting of the *Reporter* newspaper; "but I hoped I had stopped that tune," muttered Mr. Dexter, as he left his chambers, on the morning of the contradiction, on business connected with this very *Reporter*, "I hoped I had stopped it for good," and his cool forehead wore a frown as he walked through the streets. He was going to the Palestra Club, to which he had recently been re-elected, not having re-offered himself for ballot at the Reform after resigning his M.P.-ship. The Palestra was a club where most of the men who ply pen or pencil for the moral improvement of these isles were to be met, and where a blessed unanimity prevailed in condemning all that pen or pencil ever produced when the actual authors of the works did not happen to be present. Mr. Dexter hoped to find there, and to concert with, a few of the gentlemen who were to be on his staff; and he found the Rev. Nonus Nines.

"So you are really going to start a penny-dreadful, Dexter," laughed that divine, as the barrister, neat and cold as a new pin, entered the reading room. Mr. Nines was stretched in an arm-chair, near a blazing coal-fire, with a number of a *Positivist Review* in his hands.

"Yes," nodded Mr. Dexter; "and I was going to ask you to write in it. You shall have five pounds a column—ecclesiastical law."

"Church matters are not much in my competence," answered the reverend gentleman; "but who are your other men?"

"There's the list," said Mr. Dexter, "if the team breaks down it will be from bad driving."

"Yes, the cattle are good enough," admitted Mr. Nines, glancing at the list. "It's going to be a real steady coach, then?"

"Who doubted it?" replied Mr. Dexter. "We shall start in a fortnight with a series of thorough-going numbers, and we ought to be a power before the year's over. I am arranging for a French, a German, and a Yankee correspondent, who are to send us foreign trials summarized racyly; we shall print three column leaders a day, and three or four short ones; and there will be special papers—pen-sketches of the judges turn by turn, and prison-essays from a commissioner who is going the round of the gaols, asylums, and penal establishments."

"That's most attractive," said Mr. Nines, gravely. "And how about the advertisements?"

"There will be plenty of them through my partner's city friends; and so you have the whole programme before you," answered Mr. Dexter, with dry seriousness. Then glancing more narrowly at Mr. Nines, "You look as if you have been making a night of it."

"So I have, with a trio of flurried magnates," yawned Mr. Nines, putting up the *Positivist Review* before his mouth; and he humorously recounted to Mr. Dexter his last night's round of newspaper offices. "From what I could see, between you and me, Hornett is going to marry the lady, and Mayrose would like to be in his place," added the Rev. Nonus Nines, in whispered conclusion.

"What makes you think that?" inquired Mr. Dexter, attentively.

"Mayrose's own face," said Mr. Nines, looking about to see that none over-

heard him. "He is a capital fellow, and can't conceal his impressions as you do, *mi Quinte*. I wonder at the lady preferring Hornette, but I suppose money is at the bottom of it."

"I suppose so," responded Mr. Dexter, indifferently; "money is at the bottom of most things; but now I've some letters to write before going to make terms with that printer. May I rely on you for the *Reporter*? The prosecution of the Bishop of Stepney against half a dozen of his maddest curates is coming on soon. You'll find plenty to say about it."

"Very well," agreed Mr. Nines, as if writing for one paper more or less was no trouble to a man of his resources. "I see you've one of the judges on your list. Will he do his own portrait and that of his brethren?"

"He shall pull his brethren's judgments to bits if he finds the work to his taste," laughed Mr. Dexter, and so, pushing back a pair of glass doors, he walked across the tessellated floor of the hall to the writing room. The new editor was not sorry to have captured Mr. Nines, for Mr. Nines had his value in the journalistic market; besides which, adept as he was in that species of literature which consists in pointing out the "unwisdom" and the "questionable taste" of things, he would not have failed to launch some grave censure at the "penny-dreadful" if he had not been directly interested in its welfare.

Mr. Dexter wrote several letters on the *Palæstra* club-paper, appropriately stamped with the figures of two wrestling men and a motto recalling the combative virtues of literature, and then he lunched with two or three of his future contributors, smooth and discreet men all of them so far as externals went. There was an Irishman, of course, and the usual Colonel in a huff with the War Office who had turned military critic, and was strong on points of army law; an aspirant Solicitor-General, who was for cheapening procedure; and a clever man who had been refused a County-court judgeship, and thought the system of legal patronage required looking into. With these supporters Mr. Dexter held a sort of counsel, after which he had to see his printer, as stated, and this work absorbed him till close on four, at which hour he had an appointment with Sir Ham at the House of Commons to tell him exactly what the printer's terms would be. The printer was a long-headed Welsh gentleman, who, making his income—and a pretty fair one—by launching newspapers, gave to all projectors of such enterprises the counsel to have nothing to do with them. To hear him talk of the journalistic enterprises which he had seen founder was depressing in the extreme, and one gathered from his remarks that humanity was divided into two classes—the one of men who were desperately resolved in spite of remonstrances on bringing out new journals, the other of persons who absolutely declined to buy them. In support of these views he handed to customers specimen copies of departed papers, which had perished miserably after a struggling career, leaving assets to the extent of one half-penny per hundred pounds to be divided among the creditors. It was perhaps fortunate that Sir Ham had delegated the conducting of all business preliminaries to Mr. Dexter, for utterances of this kind might have damped him; but Mr. Dexter was never to be damped. His confidence in all he undertook was most brisk, and for this once even the old Welsh printer was beginning to catch some sparks of it. The same might be said of the cautious business man who was to act as publisher; of the news-agents, who were hardened sceptics by profession as to all that concerned the chances of new journals; of the advertisement agents, who had never known such things pay; and of the upholsterer who was to furnish the *Reporter* office, and who had enquired at first, without meaning wrong, whether the fittings were to be made strong as if for a permanency? Nothing seemed more promising of permanency to Mr. Dexter than the gigantic enterprise he was going to pilot; and bowling towards Westminster in a hansom, he hummed securely as he eyed the flaunting *REPORTER* posters which embellished all the boardings on his way.

Up Westminster Hall he strode, through the passage where the statues of the two Pitts look down with wonder on the race of statesmen we make nowadays, and so into the public lobby, where many members who regretted his departure from among them nodded to him and shook him by the hand. Mr. Dexter took his stand by the counter where a maiden sells oranges to the thirsty, and was shortly

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joined by Sir Ham Pennywoddle, who had been at work for two hours on a committee, and looked unconquerably nonplussed after hearing so much conflicting talk from counsel and members, who had been perspiring every one of them to make a water bill intricate. "I wish they wouldn't all talk together, Dexter," said the worthy knight, mopping his brow with a silk handkerchief, and dragging the barrister after him to one of the tea-rooms.

"You'll get used to it," suggested Mr. Dexter, pleasantly.

"Yes, but it makes one feel like flies buzzing in one's head, it do," remarked the knight; adding, "I suppose you've come about the noospaper matters. But talking of that, you saw what the papers said this morning about young Mayrose's marriage that was to be?"

"Yes," said Mr. Dexter, with apparent sympathy, "I was very sorry for his sake, for I have it on good authority that he had proposed to Lady Azalea Carol, but was refused on account of his poverty. I tell you this in confidence."

"And I shan't repeat it, Dexter," said the Knight, rolling his eyes earnestly; "but maybe he asked her because he thought she was rich."

"Who knows," said Mr. Dexter, with a thoughtful gaze at his boots. "Fortune-hunting has become so many men's profession nowadays!" And he sighed a little, as if this were a fact that must be faced since it could not be blinked.

"Well, if he did he wasn't far wrong, for fortune-huntin' 's a man's dooty," said the Knight, wagging his head; "but if the girl's refused him because he wasn't rich enough, she did him a better service than she thought for, Dexter. Mark my words!"

"I hope he will survive it," smiled Mr. Dexter, drawing some papers from his pocket as if to change the subject.

"Aye," said the Knight, taking the papers and wiping them mechanically with his coat-tail, as he used to do the implements of his trade in pristine sausage days; "aye, but I saw that young chap go through the lobby five minutes ago, and he looked down-hearted, so that I felt sorry for him. I don't mind telling you, Dexter, I've taken a fancy to that lad. He came to my Mike's funeral, and he has summut in his eyes that reads like honesty. I'll get him to come to my house—to dinner and tea, maybe; and—you'll see—God willin', good'll come of it."

"Good will come of it!" What would Zellie have thought of this, if the echo of Sir Ham's prophecy could have reached her? What indeed had she been thinking all the morning—first when her maid, that busy Miss Stitchett, had brought her an early copy of a paper with the famous contradiction; then when Violet, flushed with indignation, had trampled the paper under her little foot; and, lastly, when Lady Rosemary had come and talked tenderly with her for an hour, seeming to plead the suit of Lord Hornette? What do girls think when their first hopes are blighted—when a man proves false, or, loved in secret, appears to spurn them? Zellie had vowed to Violet that she would never give a promise to Lord Hornette, but this was before Mayrose had let it go forth to the world that he would not have her for his wife. Now she had no care whom she married—the bud that has been broken off its stem and thrown on the ground, anybody may pick up. If Zellie's education had put her in the category of girls who do wayward things, no doubt she might have vowed never to marry—she might have asked to go into a convent, or have talked of poison. But her training had left her with the knowledge that she had some duties towards her parents as well as towards herself; and since marry she must at some time or other, unless society was to be set whispering and wondering, and since again she could never love another man, why not marry Lord Hornette, who was a gentleman and a true one? Pride, perhaps, aided this reasoning, for the girl who had cleared that hedge when Mayrose had fallen from his horse was not a woman of tame spirit, not one who would pine away under a slight real or apparent. So—to sum up—when Lord Hornette came to woo Zellie he was accepted, though with what words or under what reserves there is no saying, for the young people were alone, and nobody even knew what had passed between them. But when the Earl left Rosemary House at about the hour when Mr. Dexter and Sir Ham Pennywoddle were holding their conversation he looked satisfied enough. There was an air of victory on his face, and possibly he too, was reflecting, "Good will come of it."

CHAPTER XXIII.

REMEDIA AMORIS.

When a man has been unfortunate in a love affair, the circumstance has some ludicrous aspects, apart from the keener misery endured. He must contrive to avoid meeting the late object of his affections; and one never discovers how small the world is until one tries to avoid meeting somebody in it. Nothing but a long trip abroad will quite answer the purpose, and the unwritten laws of Society do, indeed, prescribe that a rejected lover shall take himself out of the way until the lady he failed to win has been happily married to his rival. He may wait for the tidings of this event in continental hotels. The London papers will reach him in the morning or the evening, as the case may be; and his anxiety to procure them as soon as they are due will make him a valuable critic on the irregularities of the foreign postal services. The public may not be aware how much they are indebted for the safe transmission of their letters and papers to exiled lovers, who write to the *Times* from Paris, Rome, Cairo, to complain of postal delays that are worrying them, and to suggest reforms. Some of them are good enough to compile statistical tables recording the exact hours at which their papers reached them on thirty successive days of the month; and in countries where the authorities vary the occasional tardiness of delivery by confiscating the papers altogether, the lover is apt to grow warm with a sudden zeal for the free institutions he has left behind him. When the printed news of the marriage at last arrives it may come as a welcome relief, or the lover may think it has reached him too soon after all; but, in either case, he must pray against the crowding trial that may befall an exile—that of having the honeymoon of the couple from whom he has fled intruded abruptly upon him in the place of his concealment. A lover, strolling moodily down the staircase of a far-off hotel, has before now come upon a muffled pair ascending behind alacritous waiters and chambermaids, and followed by a company of porters groaning under British luggage. He has stood aside to let the group pass, and has seen—what? Happily this acute pang acts as a signal that his quarantine is at an end, and that the ports of England are once more open to him.

Unluckily for Mayrose, he could not fly to the Continent and roam there till Zellie and Lord Hornette were married, for he had to help govern Australia. During a few days he was sorely tempted to fling that favoured colony far from him, and to start off, like the man in "Locksley Hall," and set up in a wigwam with a squaw to rear his dusky race. He began to know the petty misery of shrinking from dining out or going to parties lest he should encounter Zellie and arouse Lord Hornette's suspicions anew; but on the other hand, his official position debarred him from leading the life of a hermit. He was wanted and courted. Cards encumbered his breakfast table every morning, verbal invitations were pressed on him, and, to make the situation more intricate, many of these invitations came from members of the house of Drone, among whom he was much thrown, owing to his connection with Lord Balbie, and by whom he could not but feel that he was being treated with great cordiality and kindness. This uncomfortable *imbroglio* lasted a week or more, and then Mayrose learned, in common with the rest of the world, that Lord Hornette had proposed to Zellie, that he had been accepted, and that the marriage was to take place at the end of the season. The announcement was first made to him in a friendly manner, not devoid of tact, by Lord Hornette himself, and Mayrose was so far calmed by it that he resolved, as many another man has done before him, to find solace for his disappointment in work—hard ceaseless work. As the wigwam idea was scarcely feasible, he would go out on to the war path against abuses in yonder Australia office, where abuses were plentiful so far as he could see, and had needed looking to for years. This was a brave scheme, truly; but here again Mayrose's love-entanglement was disastrous, for it obliged him to keep aloof from Rosemary House at a time when the Countess's advice was almost indispensable to him. Inexperienced as he was in official ways, new to society, and not yet conscious that a man can be over rash in well-doing as in other matters, he required to be told who were the people he must be wary of offending, and above

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all to be cautious as to how he started on such an adventurous expedition as abuse-hunting—for abuses are not to be tilted at, egad! one must circumvent them. There have been men who went out into the abuse-field armed with a scythe, and thought they did fine work because they strewed the ground with a litter of chopped things; but this was of no more use than if they had mown away the tufts of so many carrots, leaving the root and body of the vegetables safe under earth. Deeply imbedded as an acacia tree, and with roots as strong and wide-spreading, is the official abuse, so that the man who extirpates but one in a life-time may close his eyes and say, as Augustus did, "*Plaudite*." From ignorance of all this, Mayrose set out to master the Australia Office with no less fire than Quixote did to fell the windmills, and he speedily came into collision with Mr. Keane-Midge, the Permanent Under-Secretary.

"Good morning," said that valued public servant, as Mayrose arrived on the stroke of ten one day, and sat down to his desk in a well-warmed room, that overlooked St. James's Park. Mr. Keane-Midge, who was sixty years old or thereabouts, had come in with some blue papers, and looked unutterably venerable as he fingered these treasures. "Good morning!" he smiled. "I have worked with many of your predecessors, but never saw one who set such an example of punctuality to our clerks."

"I am not more punctual than yourself, Mr. Midge," said Mayrose, civilly, as he held out a hand for the papers. "The fact is, I find there is so much work that one would need all the night as well as the day to get through it."

"There is a great deal of work," assented Mr. Keane-Midge, sitting down and cleaning his gold-rimmed spectacles with his coat-skirt. "I wonder now how some of your predecessors got through it, for they toiled less than you do."

"Perhaps they were like that Frenchman who put all his letters unopened in a box and read them at the end of the year. He generally found that the matters of which they treated had got settled very well without his assistance."

"A new idea," observed Mr. Keane-Midge, thoughtfully, as if he were ready to claim that Frenchman as a brother. "I think two-thirds of the correspondence of our office might be dealt with in that way."

"Somebody here seems to have thought so too, judging by this Cocoonib business," was Mayrose's remark, uttered with a sigh. "I have to answer questions on the war in the House of Lords this afternoon, and it appears to me the whole expedition could have been avoided by a timely letter to the black King."

"The matter concerned the African office more than ourselves," answered Mr. Keane-Midge, more and more thoughtful as he inserted the branches of his spectacles over his ears. "I shall always lay the blame of that expedition on my relative, Mr. Drone-Midge, of the other department; 'though it's true that a correspondence with negroes is taxing and unprofitable. But that reminds me that you have not yet appointed a private Secretary," and the Permanent Mr. Midge raised his ancient eyebrows.

"Does talk'ing of negroes remind you of Secretaries?" smiled Mayrose. "I have been employing one of the gentlemen downstairs up to the present, but I expect a Secretary this very day."

"May I ask if he belongs to the office?" inquired Mr. Keane-Midge, in the tone of one who could have suggested a candidate of his own for this post of four hundred a year. It was one of the qualities of Mr. Keane-Midge that when a remunerative post was vacant he could always name a candidate for it.

"No, he is a second-class clerk in the Waste Paper Office; and I shall probably ask for his transfer to this department in the same capacity," replied Mayrose, glancing at the clock. "He is a cousin of mine, and ought to have been here by this time. I appointed ten o'clock."

"Oh!" said the venerable Mr. Keane-Midge, bending his head, and without conveying anything in his intonation but a wish to live on perfect terms with this transferable clerk, intruder though he were; and thereon he rose, leaving the blue papers on the table. "I had better quit you for the present, perhaps," he added, benevolently. "If you require any further facts in preparing your answer about King Cocoonib, I shall be happy to furnish them. But I would abide by this point,

that we are not prepared to give explanations of a detailed character ; that will be the pith of Lord Albert's answer in the Commons."

"A pithy answer, too," remarked Mayrose; "but before you go, Mr. Midge, would you mind giving me one word of information on the business of the office, which seems to me to be conducted in a manner wholly unintelligible. I wished to confer with Lord Albert about it. I find clerks who have been employed here fifteen years, and who do all the work, whilst others who are new and three times as well paid do nothing; the latter are entitled to a pension after ten years, the former get no pension if they serve twenty. How is that?"

"It's an old practice of the office," said Mr. Midge, like one who alludes to an interesting relic of great antiquity; "the clerks you mean are supernumeraries, only employed for temporary work."

"Temporary work, though, when it lasts fifteen and twenty years, looks to me much like permanency. What is a temporary clerk to do with himself if you turn him out without compensation after he has wasted all his manhood in the office? But again, why take in supernumeraries when you have such a large staff of permanent clerks all idling?"

"It's an old practice of this and other offices to confine each set of clerks to their special duties. It has never been considered expedient to occupy the superior and better paid clerks with mere copying work."

"I could understand that if you gave them some occupation of a higher order; but see here, I had to deal yesterday with a business which was just submitted to my predecessor, and I have had the curiosity to follow the windings of it. A letter was sent to this office nine months ago by a person who wanted to find out something about the land-grants in the Kangaroo Colony. His letter was opened, stamped, and registered by a clerk at £600 a year, who passed it on to another at £800, by whom it was endorsed with a query, and then referred to my predecessor, who laid it before the late Australian Secretary, by whom it was referred back for answer to a chief clerk at £900 a year. This chief clerk ordered a subordinate at £300 to write to the Governor of Kangaroo; a clerk at £250 copied the letter; one at £150 put it in an envelope and addressed it, and nine months after we get a reply from the Governor giving the information required, but adding that he had gone minutely into this very subject in a despatch forwarded to us two years ago! Now couldn't the clerk at £600 and the one at £800 have managed the whole matter between them by simply referring to the Governor's original despatch, and drafting an answer which the applicant would have received within two days?"

"It is not the practice of the office to return hurried answers," rejoined Mr. Keane-Midge, reflectively, "nor do I know of a system by which we could any of us be kept conversant with the contents of despatches. We receive too many of them; they fill three large rooms!"

"Well, it seems to be the practice of the office to give every one as little brain work as possible," replied Mayrose; "but suppose you and I lay our heads together, Mr. Midge, and try to simplify old practices? There are several other matters on which I may have to ask your assistance, and I make no doubt Lord Albert would assent to any sensible proposals. For the present, however, I will just look through these papers and qualify myself to tell the House of Lords that we have no explanations to give them."

And with this valediction Mayrose betook himself to the despatches, whilst Mr. Keane-Midge retired, with wisdom and quiet affability radiating from his whole person, so that they must have warmed the very soldiers parading in the Mall under the windows.

But for all this, and in his heart of hearts, the Permanent Mr. Keane-Midge was not delighted at the above dialogue, and still less so at Mayrose's purpose of introducing a cousinly clerk from another office into a confidential post. When a disturbance is threatened in a State Department it is well that the breaker of the peace—that is the innovator, abuse-reformer, or dignify him by what euphemism you will—should be made to feel that he stands like an Ishmael in the office, with no cousin by his side, but with every man's hand against him. In this way he is brought to his senses the faster. Mr. Keane-Midge could detect the signs of

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a disturbance long before they were visible to other eyes, and it was a very short study of Mayrose which had convinced him that here was a young man now who was going to make himself as pleasant as the hedge-hog did when he was invited into the snug place where the toads were. Properly, there should have been no disturbance possible, because there should have been no conflict of attributes between the two Under-Secretaries, Parliamentary and Permanent; but where the nominal head of a department loves brown-bread biscuits more than administrative details, the pair of subalterns are apt to clash together for mastery. So from the day when Mr. Keane-Midge had seen Mayrose come to the office and betray a determination either to be guided by Lord Balbie or to guide him, but on no account to be dictated to by Mr. Keane-Midge, this Permanent and irresponsible gentleman had foreseen that trials were at hand. He might prevail, or he might be worsted and submit with good grace, as he had done when worsted on other occasions; but any way he would make a fight of it, and therefore he would gladly have strengthened himself by recommending to Mayrose a Secretary of his own choosing—one who could be depended on. There is much in the influence of a Private Secretary. A nominee of Mr. Keane-Midge's, carefully selected from among the pet clerks of the establishment, would have initiated Mayrose into the true spirit of the office, dissuaded him from meddling, or at worst have kept Mr. Midge informed of what things were brewing against his weal. This is why the Permanent Under-Secretary might have been heard murmuring as he withdrew to his own desk and pigeon-holes, "I was not aware he had cousins. Who can that cousin be?"

Shortly afterwards a messenger brought in a card to Mayrose with the name, "Mr. Quilpin Leech, Tabboo Club."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PIECE OF NEPOTISM.

This Mr. Quilpin Leech was Mayrose's cousin on the maternal side. By referring to the extract from the *Peerage* quoted in the first chapter of this tale, it will be seen that Mayrose's father had married "Emily, sixth daughter of Sir Richard Leech, of Hampstead, late Commissioner at Bagpore." Of the other five daughters and of the six sons of Sir Richard, the *Peerage* makes no mention; but they were a fruitful race, whose seed covered the earth, and principally the County of Middlesex, and who established thriving branches of their dynasty at Fulham as well as Hampstead. But one must not confound the Fulham Leeches with the Hampstead Leeches. At the time when Mayrose's father was nearly ruined, the Fulham Leeches, who were connected with the city, and had riverine villas, declared it was scandalous on his part—most inconsiderate and dishonourable; the Hampstead Leeches concluded the wretched peer had not ruined himself on purpose, and so pitied him. This, however, led to a very natural schism between the two. The Fulham Leeches, who were the more numerous, and had reasons to apprehend that the embarrassed peer might come to them for loans—it is to be feared that he had some such design—ceased visiting at Berkeley Square and at Springfield; the Hampstead Leeches, on the contrary—consisting of Sir Richard's eldest son, his wife, and two maiden sisters who tenanted the roomy brick house whence Lord Mayrose had married Miss Emily—kept up friendly relations with their noble relative. Now, Mr. Quilpin Leech was the seventh son of Sir Richard's eldest born, who lived at Hampstead; and Mayrose had seen something of him and of his sisters—who made a gathering of fourteen in all—during his childhood. The father was well off, but not rich, for he had inherited the bulk of what Sir Richard had amassed as Commissioner at Bagpore without adding anything to it by his own industry; and the schooling of seven sons blessed with good appetites, to say nothing of seven daughters equally favoured by Heaven, operates drainingly on a man. So Mayrose had no sooner been gazetted to the Under-Secretaryship for Australia than he had received a batch of well-written letters, in which six of the Hampstead sons reminded him of their existence, and gave him an account of their

capabilities. Likewise, the Fulham Leeches posted him notes of congratulation, and announced themselves all capable and ready to draw Government salaries, for now that all danger of loan-begging was over, and that Mayrose seemed likely indeed to make a figure in the world, that unpleasant business of the ruin was of course generously forgiven and forgotten. Let it be added that Mayrose had not waited for the letters from Hampstead to remember his mother's kinsfolk. Soon after returning to England he had forwarded them a packing-case full of odds and ends—shawls, Turkish *babouches*, Maltese filigree jewellery, Dieppe ivories, etc., which he had bought on his travels; and immediately after his appointment he had paid an afternoon visit to Hampstead and been regaled with a dinner. The result of that visit was that Mayrose had volunteered to employ Quilpin Leech, the youngest son, as his secretary. He had not seen this youth at Hampstead, but had formed a favorable opinion of him, in the first place, because he was the only one of the seven sons who had not written to him, and in the next, because Mr. Quilpin had been in the Harrow eleven, and had taken a first-class in mathematics at Oxford. This seemed to justify a little nepotism on his behalf; and hereon it may be observed that nepotism, such as the heedless understand it, is rarely to be met with in the polite world. A man does not say, "I will appoint a dull relative of mine to a post of emolument simply because he is my kinsman;" but he says, "I will appoint my kinsman because he must needs be a sharp fellow, and because a man is better served by his relatives than by other persons." Like many of us, Mayrose would have severely judged a political opponent who should have created warm berths for his family, but he felt no scruple in offering £400 a year and a responsible station to a cousin whom he scarce knew; for this was a different matter. Nevertheless, having last beheld Quilpin Leech at that period of hobbledehoyhood when a boy's trousers are too short for him, he felt a little curious to see what manner of youngster the messenger would now introduce.

"Mr. Quilpin Leech," said the messenger, and admitted a young man of twenty-five, who walked up to Mayrose with a look of gratuitous solemnity, and held out a hand covered with a reddish glove. In a fog it must have looked as if this hand and its fellow had been abnormally frost-bitten and swollen; and Mr. Quilpin extended it in a flabby fashion, as if he wished to get it weighed.

"I am afraid you'll think I'm late," he then began, drawing out a silver watch and turning its face towards Mayrose. "Charles Lambe, though, used to say he could walk from Charing Cross to Temple Bar in no time and gain five minutes. Difference of clocks, you see. My dial says just ten."

"Well, sit down. You would have been welcome at any time," smiled Mayrose, liking this exordium. "I think it's a long time since we've met."

"Yes; we rode donkeys over Hampstead Heath," assented Mr. Quilpin, finding a chair and sitting on the edge of it. His face was turned to the light, and appeared to Mayrose not unlike a serious rat's. Nature must have originally intended to arch his small grey eyes with an overhanging brow, then have repented of such a scheme and drawn the brow right back to the apex of the head like a slope. At this apex there stood up like a crest a rebellious wisp of hair, which would have nothing to say to the parting at the back, *not* be pressed into service for the front parting down the side. It stood there and nodded, giving the head a wideawake aspect that was heightened by the remarkable volume of Mr. Leech's ears, which stood straight out like jug-handles. An expression of rueful gravity completed this prepossessing countenance. Mr. Leech looked as if he had never employed the muscles of his face to laugh with, and as though a smile, had one been coaxed from him, must have hurt him.

"Yes, those were fine donkey rides," said Mayrose, scanning his cousin's features with a sort of wonder, as he might have done the illegible inscription on an Eastern monument—those monuments on which you can read one syllable here and another there, but from which no general sense can be extracted. "You have long outgrown them, though. You came out finely at Oxford and Harrow, and I hear they are very well satisfied with you at the Waste Paper Office. Was your work hard there?"

"We-ell, fairly so in summer time," answered Mr. Quilpin Leech, pensively.

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"We used to count the *Times*' advertisements in the morning, and have 'sweeps' on them. You put the headings of the advertisements—Births, Mariages, Sales, Furnished Lodgings, and all that, you know—in one hat, and the clerks' names in another, and you each subscribe a shilling. The man who draws the 'Furnished Lodgings' generally wins the sweep. Then in the afternoon we do 'Ponto.' You know what 'Ponto' is?"

"No," replied Mayrose, mystified.

"Well, you take a salad-bowl full of water, and put a champagne cork in it. The thing to do is to fish out the cork with your teeth without spilling any of the water; but this isn't so easy, because the cork bobs about and goes to the bottom. Two men back each other to fish out the cork so many times in a minute."

"And I dare say you could back yourself against any man," said Mayrose, in a puzzled way, and much wishing that Mr. Leech would laugh, for this strange Government clerk spoke as if he were reciting verses of the decalogue.

"No, I was not good at 'Ponto,'" answered Mr. Leech, like one who makes a painful admission. "My strong point was 'hot-coal.' You know 'hot-coal.'"

"I can't say I do," replied Mayrose.

"Well, you get a saucerful of ice, and keep it in a cool place. When some one of the public comes in to ask something—he must be a nervous-looking man, though—you give him a chair, then pass behind him and play with the fire-tongs a moment, as if you wanted to catch up a coal and light something. Then watch your moment, drop a bit of the ice down the nape of the man's neck, and sing out, 'Hulloa, I beg your pardon—that's a hot coal.' As ice imitates burning pretty well, the man stands up and fidgets. You hustle him into another room, make him take off his clothes, embrocate him with a sponge, and send him home in a cab, with a wet towel on his back. A man can't see down his back, you know, so he thinks it's all right, and thanks you for your kindness."

Mayrose laughed.

"I suppose your object is to let me know that you have had nothing to do as yet; so I'll contrive to find you employment. You can write well?"

"I write articles for some of the weekly papers," answered Mr. Leech; "and I believe people are agreed in pronouncing them uncommonly bad."

"I am not alluding to style—I mean handwriting," said Mayrose, not knowing at all how to tackle this kinsman. "Suppose you just sit down here, and I'll dictate something."

"Yes, with pleasure," said Mr. Leech, as if he had been asked to chant the responses of the burial service; and laying down his hat and umbrella—the latter had a death's head-knob—he took the seat which Mayrose had vacated. Then he removed his red gloves, tried the nib of a steel pen with his thumb, and gave something nearly approaching a dejected wink to intimate that he was ready.

Mayrose dictated to him ten lines of a dispatch, and Mr. Leech's pen careered smoothly over the paper without making a sound. At the tenth line Mayrose said, "That will do;" but Mr. Leech's pen continued to course about in a series of noiseless dashes for half a minute more, and when he held up his performance Mayrose bit his lips to avoid laughing outright again. The lines were absolutely like copper-plate—no engraver could have written better; but at the bottom of the page Mr. Leech had sketched the presentment of Mr. Keane-Midge, as if that permanent gentleman had been sitting during hours to him for his portrait. It was a caricature most easy and perfect, but Mr. Leech looked as unconscious as if he had simply dropped a blot at the foot of the writing.

"It seems you know Mr. Keane-Midge?" said Mayrose, glancing at his cousin.

"Well, we Leeches have been sucking for some years at the Consolidated Fund, and we naturally hob-nob with the Rodents and the Midges, who are in the same line of business. But I happen to know old Keane-Midge well, because he gave some of his time to a friend of mine—knocked him down flat."

"I shouldn't have thought Mr. Midge was a man to knock down anybody."

"Not with his fists, he flattened him with paper. I should be glad to speak to you about that case one of these days, supposing you have the power and the inclination to pick up a man who's down—a man with a pretty daughter."

"Do you mean to say Mr. Midge has committed an act of injustice? If so, I should certainly try my power at getting it remedied." And Mayrose's face kindled somewhat.

"I never knew of an injustice committed in a State office," responded Mr. Quilpin, wagging his wisp of hair, "but there are mistakes, and this will turn out to be a mistake, if you have the strength to get it proved such. But you'll find it warm work."

"You will make a queer Secretary," exclaimed Mayrose, "more and more puzzled, 'but come and begin your work to-morrow. You can tell me then about your friend.'" And saying this, Mayrose resumed his seat. He little suspected that he had just involved himself in an affair which was to act on his career as the grain of sand does on a skater's course—an affair which was to make of his hitherto smooth life one of strange emotions and adventures.

As for Mr. Quilpin Leech, being released from his cousin's presence, he stalked lugubriously downstairs, and, addressing the porter who swung back the hall door for him, said, "My name's Leech—remember that, and I'm to be one of the ornamental fixtures of this place. If the Prime Minister ever calls to see me, keep him waiting a little in the cold, for I shall have my dignity to maintain." And with this he emerged into Whitehall, and hailed a hansom.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. QUILPIN LEECH KILLS THE FATTED CALF.

Mr. Quilpin Leech did not live at Hampstead with his parents and maiden aunts, but had a third-floor lodging in one of those streets which branch out on either side of the Strand like the smaller bones of a fish from the main vertebra. As a clerk of the Waste Paper Office, he had been in the receipt of £800 a year public moneys, and his father had allowed him £100 in excess of this income, which makes a revenue on which some men would have contrived to clothe themselves in fine linen and eat of the fat of the land. But, for reasons which may hereinafter appear, Mr. Quilpin had not lived hitherto like one who was easy in his circumstances, and the fat of the land was known to him only by hearsay.

His cab took him to Charing Cross, but, instead of hieing straight to Surrey-street, obeyed the directions of his death's-head umbrella, thrust through the trap, and paused before a big grocer's, where Mr. Leech alighted, and presently emerged hugging two bottles of champagne and one of sherry swathed in pink paper, whilst a shopman followed, bearing a Yorkshire pie, a Mayence ham (cooked), and some of the dried fruits of this earth—to wit, figs and raisins. Again the cab moved on, and stopped successively before a confectioner's, where Mr. Leech freighted himself with a pair of roast fowls, a tart, and various biscuits; then before a fishmonger's, where a vigorous-looking lobster was procured; after which Mr. Leech bade the driver, in a pensive voice, take him to Covent Garden. Here, under that unique arcade, fragrant with all the flowers of hot-housedness, and with those fruits which are the pampered aristocracy of the vegetable realm, Mr. Leech disappeared, and he must have been intent on exhausting at one taste all the savours comprised in the fat of the land; for, after leisurely inspecting the shops on both sides of the way, he halted before the showiest of them all. What overgrown mushrooms were here displayed, what pyramids of obese pears at one guinea a piece, what little wooden buckets of strawberries (it was April), and what monumental melons, need not be described; enough that Mr. Leech, having bought the wherewith to make a salad, invested gold in a purchase of buckets as above, mandarin oranges, and lady-Apples, and, this done, set eyes on a row of bouquets perched high in long-necked glass vases, blue and purple.

"Delicious bouquets, sir," said the talkative maiden who stood in the doorway at the receipt of custom.

"What's the price of that one?" asked Mr. Leech, jerking his hat sideways at the lot.

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"That one's a pound, sir," answered the maiden; "the most beautiful white lilac and Parma violets you ever saw."

"No, I've seen better," protested Mr. Leech; "but I mean the one next that," and this time his hat sloped towards the most gorgeous nosegay on the line. Imagine a fabric about a yard in circumference, and composed of an outer circle of pink rosebuds, then a circle of violets, then white rosebuds, violets again, then white violets, then an inner cluster of more pink rosebuds forming the bull's eye to this comely target for men and women's glances.

"Ah, that one's a most lovely bouquet, and it's four guineas, sir," ejaculated the maiden, climbing on a stool to reach her handiwork. "We send one like it—the same size, I mean—every morning to the Albany for the Earl of Hornette, who is going to be married, and he forwards them to his bride that is to be."

"I am not engaged to be married, and I don't live in the Albany," said Mr. Leech, gravely; "but I'll take the bouquet all the same;" and he forthwith paid his money, which amounted to a considerable sum. Then a porter in fustian was summoned to carry the things, and with this man Mr. Leech returned to the cab waiting for him amidst that litter of orange peel, cabbage leaves, and carrot stumps which would seem to be providently strewn round our chief market by the College of Surgeons, in order that the supply of sprained ankles and broken legs may never run short. Mr. Leech's shopping, however, was not quite ended, for he wished to provide himself an adjunct to his strawberries in the shape of a pot of Devonshire cream, but this last purchase being effected, he had nothing further on his mind, and arrived without hindrance at the lowermost end of Surrey street, where his abode lay.

It was a decrepid house, whence by cricking one's neck through an upper window one could descry the Thames and the traffic of bustling penny steamers thereon. Perhaps Dr. Johnson had dined or supped in the parlour with the faded moire curtains, for there is scarcely a house among those adjoining this portion of the Strand but preserves the memory of some eighteenth century worthy; and then the place may have looked well once, when its blackened bricks were red, when the extinguishers on either side of its door really served for the torches of linkmen, and when the street, slanting down unwall'd to the river strand, afforded a passage to hooped gentlewomen and wigged critics of Mr. Goldsmith tripping down to be wherried to the Temple Gardens. For the present, the door was illustrated with a white metal plate, on which was engraven the name of LEGGES, in letters so large as to leave no doubt that this must be the identical Legges for whom the visitor might be seeking, and that all other Legges, wheresoever they might lurk, must be spurious. Mr. Leech, turning a latch-key in the door, pushed back the name of Legges, and, in three voyages, assisted by the cab-man, removed his delicacies into a narrow hall, papered with a false semblance of yellow marble, and set them on the cocoa-nut matting, to the apparent mystification of a black cat who sat on the staircase. Then he discharged his cabman. But here let it be confessed that Mr. Leech and his cabmen did not usually part on such easy terms as this. Coming home late at night, to a silent street in a cab, the Government clerk had a simplicity all his own for saying to the driver, "Will you kindly lend me a match? I fancy I have dropped a sovereign in your cab;" whereupon, if the driver had not well pondered the policy of honest ways, Mr. Leech would be relieved of all anxiety about the fare, for the driver would lash his horse with the whip and gallop away into the darkness. But it is a comfort to add that no more than four cabmen out of five ever fell into this trap, so that the beggars to whom Mr. Leech honourably remitted the fares which he saved by the above device profited less than they might have done if we English had been on the whole a base people.

But now the door having banged behind the cabman, Mr. Leech cried "Whish-sh!" to the black cat, to scare him away from the neighbourhood of the roast fowl and cream, then stole to the end of the passage and leaned over a baluster which descended to the kitchen. A jig played on a church organ could not have had a more abrupt effect than the song which then issued from Mr. Leech's smileless mouth, in this wise:—

"Matron, fresh as roses fair,
Tune thy lips, and tell me now,
Hast thou news for me down there?
If so, speak, say what's the row?"

"Yes, Mr. Leech, there's a letter for you up in your room," answered a shrill voice from below.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Mr. Leech, as if much shocked, "this is a breach of a binding contract between parties," and vaulting astride the baluster, he slid rapidly down to the foot of the staircase, and tumbled into the kitchen, where a matron with crimson cheeks and ample throat was basting a shoulder of mutton turning before the fire. "Mrs. Legges, I am surprised at you!"

"Oh! don't worrit, Mr. Leech," screamed the lady addressed. "I'm that put out this morning that I couldn't sing if all the brass bands in London was playing to me; no, not I. What with mutton rising a penny the pound, and the butcher sticking a piece of fat under his scales—which I see with my own eyes and called attention to, scornin' unfair dealings—and the fat being put there to give a customer short weight, which I know and could a-swear to all afore all the police courts as ever was, and——"

"Take breath, Mrs. Legges, you are getting embarrassed in you grammatical periods," said Mr. Leech, removing the ladle with gentle compulsion from his landlady's hands, and beginning to baste the mutton himself with magisterial solemnity. "When cool enough to weigh the sense of your obligations, I will remind you of a compact freely entered into between us for the promotion of social harmony."

"Yes, I know, when you sing I'm to sing, Mr. Leech, but songs don't come from a frettin' heart, and it's no use expecting it," exclaimed the impatient Mrs. Legges, catching up the salt-box and throwing a handful of its contents between the grate-bars to clear the fire.

"Well, Mrs. Legges," proceeded Mr. Quilpin Leech, with a mild flourish of the ladle over the spluttering joint, I maintain that nothing is more calculated to break the continuity of amicable relations than for one of the parties to a bargain to put his or her independent construction on it. When I undertook your musical education by means of press-orders for the opera and the plays, I begged you to consider whether the practice of enlivening conversation by means of songs and dances, as is done on the stage, would not be conducive to the gladness of life; and you were pleased to admit, speaking over a supper of oysters and porter, in the parlour up-stairs, that such a practice would be so conducive, and would make you a happy woman. Did you admit that or not?"

"Ye-es," shrieked Mrs. Legges, spreading out a sheet of dough on a wooden slab, and thumping it energetically with a rolling-pin.

"And did the supper on the occasion referred to conclude with what the Americans term 'golden bucks'—that is, Welsh rare-bits; by some erroneously and foolishly called 'rabbits'—with poached eggs on the top? Did it or did it not so conclude, Mrs. Legges?"

"Oh, drop that silly talk—now, do, Mr. Leech; and let me make the Second Floor's apple-dumplings in peace and quietness!" groaned flustered Mrs. Legges, working away at the rolling-pin till the beads stood on her plump forehead. "There's Meggie'll sing for you as much as you like. The light-hearted hussey does nothing but sing since you sent her to see them nigger minstrels; and I'll bet a 'apenny she's up to it now instead of cleaning out the cobwebs from the Second Floor's bedroom, which he complained of yesterday, swearing so that one wouldn't have thought to hear the like in a Christain country; and so I told him. But now stand out of my way, do!" and the dough being flattened, Mrs. Legges, with a knife in her hand, darted towards some plethoric pudding-apples. "I'm a faintin' from work—that's what I am—and it's a wonder to me how you have got away from yours so early this morning, of all others, and come here, I suppose, to want a chop done for you and other things besides, taking up a body's time till two in the afternoon, till sickness'll be the end of it: that's what it'll be."

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"Pause again for breath, Mrs. Legges," interrupted Mr. Leech, still plying the ladle methodically, "but, first of all, one question—Is Mr. Marvell at home?"

"Yes; and up to his blessed ears in ink and paper as usual," responded Mrs. Legges, slicing savagely at the apples.

"And is Miss Marvel in?" continued Mr. Leech.

"No; Miss Grace is out, and not expected in till one," answered Mrs. Legges, in a softened tone, as she swathed the now reduced apples in their paste garments.

"Well, then, Mrs. Legges, you may pacify yourself about my chop," observed Mr. Leech, turning himself from his labour of love and dripping. "If this had been an ordinary day I might have come in and said, in the words of the much-misquoted poet:—

'I prithee go and get me some repast;
I care not what, so it be wholesome food.'

But this is a *dies non*, which your Hebrew dictionary will explain to mean a day that never occurs in the lives of most men and seldom in that of others. In short, the ingredients of a banquet were introduced into this house ten minutes ago; and I have come to borrow your parlour for the feast which will be held as soon as Miss Marvell comes in—*Diis volentibus*—if your cat has not eaten the fowls!"

What Mrs. Legges might have replied to this there is no saying, nor does it much matter, but at this moment a blithesome voice was heard, a down-at-heel but light step clattering down the staircase, and Meggie, the servant-wench, appeared with smudges on her face, a dust-pan, brush, and broom in her hands, and her apron tucked up. She had been carolling, as she descended, "Coming through the Rye," but, at sight of Mr. Leech, immediately broke out with a laugh into—

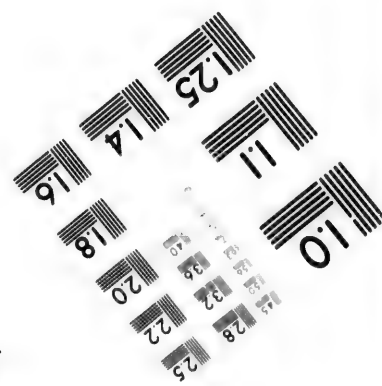
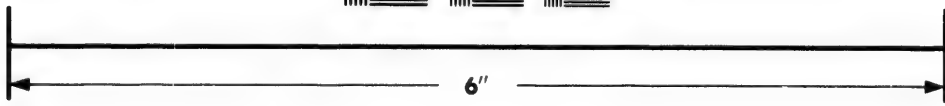
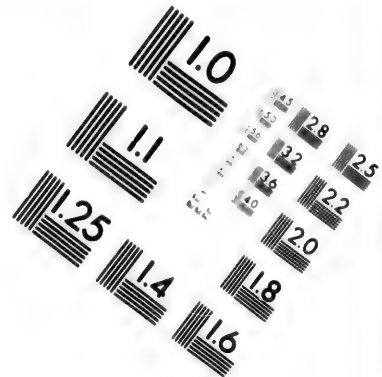
"Slap, bang! here we are again!
Here we are again! here we are again!
Slap, bang! here we are again,
Come home to play and tea."

"No!—that's the evening salute," objected Mr. Leech, holding up the ladle like a conductor's stick. "It should be the noon-tide hymn of lunch. But your voice is improving, Abigail;" and hereon ensued a duet, enlivened by the screaming appeals of Mrs. Legges, and by the voice of a potman shouting "Bee-e-er!" from the top of the area. In the midst of it Mr. Leech escaped, clambering up the staircase three steps at a time and followed by the mirthful and draggle-tail Meggie, who in the front hall received his orders as to the disposal of his viands in a fair array on the parlour table. There was to be snowy tablecloth and napkins; all the crockery and dessert dishes which the establishment could muster; the champagne glasses from Mrs. Legges' private cupboard; a vase to stand as central piece with the bouquet in it; and eggs and oil were to be procured to the end that Mr. Leech might make *mayonnaise* sauce for his loyster. These instructions given, Mr. Leech added impressive directions that Meggie—or Abigail, as he preferred to call her—should don her gala uniform; the said gala being a Swiss peasant dress which Mr. Quilpin had bought Meggie, pursuant to his theory that not only the vocalizing but also the attire of the stage should be adopted in private life whenever practicable. Mr. Leech gave Meggie a brace of half-crowns to inculcate his orders, and leaving her free to conclude that he had been robbing a bank or inheriting a fortune, as she pleased, his next move was to ascend to the first floor. His countenance, always gloomy, became unutterably so as he knocked at a door and received an answer, sharp and waspish as an explosion—

"Who's there? I can't be disturbed."

"It is I, Mr. Marvell, and I think I have good news—good news for you and your case."

"For my case!" cried the voice in weak agitation, and there was a shuffling of slippers across the carpet, then a key turned in the lock. The door was opened and exhibited an old man in a soiled dressing-gown, who held a pen dripping with ink in his shrivelled hand, and appeared to let go the door-handle with the mistrust of one who is not used to welcome visits. He might have been sixty years of age, judging by the wisps of unkempt white hair that stood up round his high forehead,



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like ruffled feathers; and deep crow's-feet, the finger-marks of care and fever rather than of time, wrinkled his fallow temples. There was a glare in his eyes which a doctor would have taken for the horrid gleam of insanity; and he was not a slightly object, nor clean. His linen was worse than dingy, his beard a stubble; the fingers of both his hands were stained with ink that looked many days old; and the room to which he reluctantly admitted Mr. Leech was a den strewn with papers more madly than a printer's shop. Newspapers with gashes in them where paragraphs had been cut out, books of law lying open back uppermost, printed proof-sheets, and heaps of manuscript written in a wild hand on folios of foolscap, were littered round a writing-table coated thick with dust, and covered with a rubbish of rusty pens, old letters, and empty ink-bottles. It was the lair of a man who disowned society, or been disowned.

"What is it?" inquired Mr. Marvell, stepping back, and drawing his dressing-gown closer over his furrowed throat. "I am terribly busy, Leech. I wrote to Mr. Dexter, who you told me was the editor of that new paper which is coming out, and asked him to take up my case. He answered, and begged me to explain my wrongs, and I am drawing up my case in full for him. A paper dealing with law matters is just the organ I wanted."

"I think, though, I have something better than that," said Mr. Leech, picking a Digest of Civil Law out of the coal-scuttle. "Catch hold of my sleeve if you find the news too much for you."

"What is it?" repeated the old man with wizen anxiety.

"I have got transferred to the Australia Office," said Mr. Leech. "Since this morning I am Lord Mayrose's private secretary, and I shall be able to see now that your case has a proper hearing." And he briefly gave an account of how his great rise had come about.

"Ah! I knew the day would arrive at last," gasped Mr. Marvell, as the glare in his eyes deepened to a glow. "I knew my wrong couldn't remain forever unavenged. For it's a damning wrong, Leech, it's a wrong that would make the stones cry out. No man was ever injured as I have been."

"Well, everything will come right now," rejoined Mr. Leech, rubbing his large ears with conviction. "It happens that my new master is my cousin, though I have not boasted about it before, for cousins are like frogs, only worth cultivating when you've a use for them. But now I want you to come and lunch with me, to solemnise this unusual sort of day; and perhaps Miss Marvell will do me the honour—"

"Yes, my daughter—but where is she?" exclaimed Mr. Marvell, striking his forehead absently, as if he had said: "Where is my penholder?" "Oh, yes, she's out. She came home two days ago from her school for the Easter holidays, and has gone to see her friend, Miss Pennywoddle, daughter of Sir Ham, the Member. I was thinking he might bring my case before Parliament, but Grace doesn't like to talk about it; she doesn't understand, nor more did my son, who emigrated to Melbourne, understand. None of them can see through this case."

"Miss Marvell will be in by luncheon time?" asked Mr. Leech, wagging his rebellious tuft of hair like a point of interrogation.

"I am afraid she will. We should be much better alone, you and I, under these new circumstances, for I could talk my case over with you, and remind you of the strong points. You see, Leech, it's a case that needs learning by heart almost, and a girl will be in our way."

Mr. Leech did not seem to think this, and proved it by a slight twitching of his lower jaw, as if he were swallowing something hot.

"We can talk of your case all the same before to-morrow, and we will, if we sit up the night for it," he observed glumly; "but now I'll leave you, and I'll come to take Miss Marvell down when everything's ready. But mind, I've told Lord Mayrose that I've a case for his notice. So bring an appetite with you, for your redress is in the bud."

"You're a good lad," muttered the old man, shambling feebly back to his desk. "I'll finish my case, though, for this new paper. Friends seem mustering up around me at last, but God knows I can't afford to lose one of them."

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And whilst his comforter withdrew, Mr. Marvell bent over his work and shivered with cold, though the air was tepid outside. His pen crinkled over the paper, the sheets slid away from him when filled, deeper and deeper grew the fire in his eyes; and he wrote and wrote—tales of wrongs and sufferings, and appeals for right, which would never be read—unless, indeed, there be a power which takes account of such appeals, and docketts them among archives which are not of this earth.

Mr. Job Marvell was a man who had "a grievance."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MAN WITH A GRIEVANCE.

But what is a man with a grievance? Well, so far as Mr. Marvell was concerned, the explanation can be given briefly. In days when he was not white-haired, and bestowed care on his person, Mr. Marvell had held an appointment under Government in one of the Australian colonies. It was a responsible post, which means that the titulant was an object of spirited envy to place-hunters at home, and a butt for never-ending criticisms to the people whose affairs he had to regulate abroad. Mr. Marvell, however, got on fairly with enviers and detractors till destiny sent him as a subordinate an off-shoot of the two great houses of Drone and Midge, with whom he found it impossible to get on at all. This was a pity, for by doing himself a little violence he might have got on as well with the young Drone-Midge as with the others; and it is to be noted that there are some people with whom one must get on just as one gets into a highly starched shirt every morning, however uncomfortable the starch may feel at first. But perhaps Mr. Marvell under-estimated the moral worth of the young Drone-Midge or the strength of his family connections; anyhow there was that want of cordiality between the two which can never be fully appeased until one of the parties goes to the wall. Now Mr. Marvell tried to plant the young Drone-Midge against the wall, and the young Drone-Midge butted back with both his horns down, like a very energetic young goat, as he was. Mr. Marvell wrote despatches to the Home Government praying that Mr. Drone-Midge might be recalled if Her Majesty's service was to be conducted as heretofore; and Mr. Drone-Midge sent counter despatches as also private letters heaping up charges against Mr. Marvell, and averring that Her Majesty's service could in no manner proceed if this official retained his place. In such junctures one must either concede the principle that a chief may exact implicit obedience from his subordinates and require their summary dismissal when they are fractious, or one must take up the contrary position that the fractious subordinate, if well connected, has a right to demand the recall of his uncongenial chief. The Home Government, represented throughout these difficulties by Mr. Keane-Midge, the permanent and irresponsible Under-Secretary of the Australia Office, declined committing itself to either of these views, but advised Mr. Marvell to be more accommodating; with this result, that the young Drone-Midge, feeling himself supported, followed his own courses, the affairs of Her Majesty's service got into a mess, and Mr. Marvell bore the blame, being responsible, whereas Mr. Drone-Midge was not. Additional acid was infused into the business by the conduct of some of the mercantile colonists, over whose goings on Mr. Marvell had kept a somewhat too sharp eye, and who, now divining that a well-connected and well-bred young official like Mr. Drone-Midge must be more powerful than a man who owed his position to mere merit, retaliated on Mr. Marvell for the grudges they owed him, and took the subordinate's part. So in the upshot it came to this, that when blames innumerable had accumulated on Mr. Marvell's head for mismanagement, which was none of his making, when half the mercantile community were arrayed against him, and when the other half who had taken no sides in the dispute at first were growing clamorous, for the sake of rest, that the dispute should end somehow—then a squabbling matter arose in which either Mr. Marvell or Mr. Drone-Midge must be culpable, though both could not be so. Let us be sure that Mr. Drone-Midge acted at this stage of the crisis, as he had done throughout, with

perfect good faith, and that it was a sincere grief to him that he could not co-operate with his chief as he would have desired; on the other hand, let there be no doubt that the Permanent Mr. Keane-Midge's long experience at the Australia office enabled him to decide, with the utmost equity, who was censurable in a quarrel where a relative of his own was one of the contendants. He did decide, and judging, as we should all of us have done, that the blame must lie on Mr. Marvell, who was chief and responsible, and not on Mr. Drone-Midge, who was subordinate and irresponsible, he requested Mr. Marvell to resign. Mr. Marvell refused, and was ill advised enough to put his case into the hands of an independent M. P.—one of those Westminster mosquitos without kith or kin who sting the occupants of the Treasury Bench with unpleasant questions, and buzz annoyingly. But this was a declaration of war, and when a great department of the State is attacked what wonder that it should defend itself? The Australia office—that is, Mr. Keane-Midge as before—issued a blue-book, compiled of all the charges brought against Mr. Marvell by the angry mercantile folk, by Mr. Drone-Midge and others—forgot, probably by an oversight, to print his refutations along with them, and dismissed him from the service. From that day Mr. Marvell was “a Man with a Grievance,” and his prose filled the newspapers.

Now, it is astonishing what a number of people there are with a grievance, and what a fuss they will make in the papers. They must be endowed with that robust faith which rebuffs cannot shake, nor precedents enlighten; for the press is as about as helpless an instrument as well may be for remedying any instance of private hardship in connection with Government. Editors echo the groans of masses, not of individuals. A hundred men who have been wronged of sixpence apiece are more interesting than one man who has been despoiled of ten thousand; and if the man who has lost his ten thousand thinks differently, and prints columns to prove that the ten thousand ought still to be in his possession, the best he can hope is to be charged with having stated his case with a great deal too much animus, and with having consequently thrown away any claim to public sympathy. Animus is indeed a thing to be avoided; and the man who has been aggrieved cannot learn too soon to view his sufferings with a dispassionate eye. He must be prepared to own that much of his grievance was due to his own fault, and that, however certain systems may have been indirectly to blame as regards him, the conduct of all the individuals from first to last concerned in his ruin was actuated by the purest motives. Else we should come upon the utterly untenable proposition that two or more men may have conspired together to damage a third, which would never do; for if once we were to grant that a personage in place could have borne malice, there is no knowing where such a theory might land us. If the Man with a Grievance has sense enough to grasp these truths; if he is the first to declare that his discomfiture can only be the result of a very pardonable error; if he has money enough left to give pleasant dinners and to obtain a seat in Parliament; if he is cheerful and patient, humble and never importunate; if he abstains from making anything like a noise, and, above all, from associating his own affair with those of other malcontents having grievances—then, in course of time, it is just possible that he may right himself so far that people will agree with him that, by his own showing, he was a fool, though, perhaps, not a mischievous one. But whatever he does let him keep from print, for print means hubbub; and the editor who absolutely declines to insert a single line of his remonstrances, renders him unwittingly the greatest of services.

Unhappily for himself, Mr. Marvell had not been competent to grasp these truths. His dismissal had ruined him, and he was so pertinacious in trying to enlist public indignation against this wholly personal wrong, that he became a great nuisance to editors, who soon belaboured him with leaders in their self-defence, and finally shut their doors on him. Then began that second stage in the Odyssey of men with a grievance—the stage of appeals to Government “graciously to reconsider my case.” Mr. Marvell addressed petitions to the succeeding Ministers who were appointed to the Australian Office, and petitions to the Sovereign; but these processes amounted as a matter of fact to considerings and reconsiderings of his

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case by the Permanent Mr. Keane-Midge who had dismissed him. When a new Minister received Mr. Marvell's petition he naturally applied to Mr. Keane-Midge for information about the alleged grievance; and when the Sovereign received the petition, she, too, as bound by the Constitution, referred it to the Minister—in other words to the Permanent Keane-Midge, who again pronounced judgment on his work; so that, although in course of time Mr. Marvell obtained half a dozen official confirmations of his dismissal, he had virtually been condemned by one man alone, who had acted successively as prosecutor, judge of first instance, judge on appeal, and had wound up by approving all his various judgments in the name of the Crown. A military or naval officer who is accused has at least a court-martial to try him, but an official under Government has no claim to a trial; he must go through the above tribulations exactly as Mr. Marvell did, and when he has been cold-shouldered by the press, and had all his appeals rebuffed, he will pass into the third phase of "grievance." Then it is that he sets up in lodgings, and sniffs the air for all new journals which may be started, and for new politicians who rise up with a cry for "Reform!" He becomes a bore.

It was in this last phase of his grievance-urging that Mr. Marvell had become known to Mr. Leech through their both lodging under the same roof; but wherefore Mr. Leech had taken an interest in a case which had long ceased to interest any other human being, is a matter for his concern, not ours. One can only say Mr. Marvell was not interesting in manners or temper. There are some men who spurn a grievance under their foot, and rise high by it as off a spring-board; others who do not rise, but whose private virtues increase even as the fertility of soil increases when it is ploughed to its depths; but Mr. Marvell went the ways of the weak and querulous. He had become captious, spleenful, and offensive; a disagreeable old man, who would have been the better for soap and water, and who shook his case under the noses of all comers like a poor maniac rattling his chains. Nevertheless Mr. Leech adhered to him from the day they had first met.

But it was not, surely, for the Man with the Grievance that Mr. Leech had bought the bouquet, the Yorkshire pie, the strawberries; not for him that he sat in the parlour with a salad-bowl between his knees, and beating-up eggs, oil, and vinegar to make *mayonnaise* sauce such as Frenchmen love. Surely it was not for him either that he gave a mighty start when a barouche clattered up to the door shortly after one, rousing all the echoes of Surrey-street, and bringing numerous peering faces to the windows. The coachman of the barouche wore black gloves and epaulettes, and so did the footman, who gracefully stepped down, and banged at the door till the parlour where Dr. Johnson may have supped was shaken to its roots, along with the whole house overhead. Then through the parlour-blind Mr. Leech saw Miss Grace Marvell descend—the same we admired in the village school at Penny—and behind her a compact young lady, all in black, save collars and cuffs, white and spruce as steel. "Now, what can all this mean?" murmured the clerk, as he renewed his beating operations with depressed vigour, making the wooden salad-spoon go flap-flop in the yellow sauce.

He was soon to know what it meant. The young ladies having ascended to Miss Grace's room, footsteps were shortly heard coming down as far as Mr. Marvell's study; then a knock, some peevish conversation audible through the ceiling; after this an impatient ring, and in due course Meggie entered and asked Mr. Leech to relinquish his bowl and go up to Mr. Marvell, who wanted him. Meggie had put on her Swiss costume, eke washed her face, so that with scarlet skirt, velvet bodice, and speckless chemisette—articles of raiment which, by the way, occasioned much grief and scandal to Mrs. Legges—she looked well capable of looking after the foreign sauce, which Mr. Leech sorrowfully resigned to her, wondering whether anything were going to happen now to mar his carefully-prepared banquet.

He ran up stairs, and there Mr. Marvell confronted him, clothed in a shabby coat and boots, but looking one shade more respectable than before.

"Leech, here's Grace and her friend Miss Pennywaddle want to take me out for a drive," he whined, biting the feather off the quill which so seldom left his hands. "Tell her it can't be; we are going to talk over my case after luncheon. I am going to be righted at last, Grace; you'll have no need to teach then; we'll

have our carriage, as we had before. But it's no use my telling the girl all that; she doesn't believe it."

"Papa has not been out of doors for a month, Mr. Leech; said Grace Marvell, with a flush on her face as she shook the clerk's hand. It seemed, indeed, as if she paid little attention to what her father said. "Please tell him the fresh air will do him good."

"No, I cannot recommend fresh air without a preliminary of sustaining food," answered Mr. Leech, in dismay. "Supposing you rather ask Miss Pennywoddle to come and join us? She doesn't know me, but luncheon isn't compromising, and I have added a cubit to my stature since this morning."

Grace Marvell, who shone like a young Juno with her queenly stature and sculptural form beside the rat-faced clerk, made a hesitating gesture.

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Leech, but the carriage is waiting."

"Carriages were made to wait, and if this one is unused to it, let it go, and Miss Pennywoddle shall return in the grandest cab I can find."

It was not easy to argue with the clerk, and Grace Marvell, whose acquaintanceship with him was but two days old, was not so inured to his eccentricities as to know the weak parts of them. She appeared to consider him as crazed as her father, and perhaps in a way as the latter's abettor and evil counsellor. But, after a little parley, she yielded to his invitation, because Mr. Marvell had returned to his desk and looked as if nothing short of violence would transport him to the barouche. In the upshot Mary Pennywoddle was asked whether she would come and lunch with Mr. Quilpin Leech, and she cheerfully said she would, on hearing him described as "a gentleman who means well towards papa."

"It's very good-natured of you to accept such a rough-and-ready invitation," said the clerk, when the presentation had been effected in that dreary room, among the dust and papers.

"It's more good-natured of you to make it," answered unceremonious Mary.

"Leech means to regale us, because he has been promoted to be Secretary to Lord Mayrose, and Lord Mayrose is his cousin," stammered Mr. Marvell, giving his arm to Mary, and leading the way down stairs with unsteady steps. "If Lord Mayrose rights me I'll regale you too. All my happiness and honour are now in the hands of that young man."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LADY BEAUJOLAIS' GOOD ADVICE.

The reader may have feared that we were going to drag him through all the windings of the dispute, Marvell v. Keane-Midge. Let him allay that very proper dread, and imagine that a fortnight has elapsed between this and the last chapter. No more need be said about that last fortnight than that at the end of it a whisper had got about Whitehall and Downing street and the lobbies at Westminster, that there was a "shindy" at the Australia Office, though how the said shindy had arisen, and why it was being prolonged, and what would come of it, were points as mysterious as are the reasons for a family jar to the neighbors listening to the smashing of crockery outside. On the last day of the fortnight, Mayrose, instead of going to his office at the usual hour in the morning, drove to the official residence of the Prime Minister. He had that light blue circle round his eyes which speaks of days spent in excitement, and trod firmly like a man who is prepared to do a great thing or a foolish one.

He had been summoned by Mr. Paramount, and there were gathered with the Premier, in the shabby house which England allots to her chief ruler, Lord Balbie Drone in much distress; Lord Rosemary, who was quite cool though astonished; Lord Beaujolaie, the master of the Queen's Beagles, who was credited with a tact for smoothing away unpleasantnesses; and little Sir Tito Tumb, who, it has been said, was the cuneiform member of this Administration, fitting into round holes or square holes alike, and always ready with an opinion.

"Now, what is it, Mayrose?" said urbane Mr. Paramount, after greetings had been exchanged: "it seems you cannot work with Mr. Keane-Midge?"

"Mayrose wa-wants to-o have M-M-Midge dismissed," stammered Lord F. 'bie, brushing his hat the wrong way with his cuff. "I-I t-tell him its i-i-impossible," and he looked piteous.

"Mr. Midge or I must withdraw, for I can be of no use in the office whilst he is there," answered Mayrose, mustering all his firmness. "I find the place full of abuses and absurd routine, and Lord Albert agrees with me that many of these matters call for change, but Mr. Midge resists us both. He is master in the office."

"Couldn't you make it up with him?" suggested handsome Lord Beaujolais, coaxingly.

"These disagreements produce such a bad effect out of doors!" was little Sir Tito Tumb's contribution.

"Mr. Midge is a very old and valued public servant," remarked Mr. Paramount, assuagingly.

"It is not only Mr. Midge's passively stubborn refusal to co-operate with us in useful changes," continued Mayrose, disregarding Sir Tito, "I have discovered that an act of injustice was perpetrated upon a gentleman who was blameless. Lord Albert is of opinion, too, that the case is one of hardship, but Mr. Midge declares he will sooner resign than have the wrong undone."

"Ah, yes; tell us about that case; isn't there a girl in it?" exclaimed Lord Beaujolais, stroking his golden beard and looking up archly.

"A pretty girl who has come two or three times, and cried before you," added Sir Tito Tumb, like an oracle.

"Cases in which young ladies are mixed up are necessarily interesting," said Mr. Paramount, with demure indulgence; but I must remind you that Mr. Marvell's alleged grievance was decided upon by our predecessors. We have no right to re-open the case."

"It has been decided upon half a dozen times," replied Mayrose, with warmth, "but always by Mr. Keane-Midge. I took the trouble of enquiring of the last Australian Secretary and of Lord Tweedledoe, who held the post when our party were last in, and they both confessed that they knew nothing of the matter further than what Mr. Midge had told them. And now Lord Albert, after hearing my explanations, concurs with me that Mr. Marvell must have been innocent."

"I-I said I tho-ought he was i-in-no-o-cent befo-ore his dismi-missal," stutered Lord Balbie.

"But it appears he has become as cracked as a jug since then," interposed Lord Beaujolais.

"We couldn't reinstate a lunatic, you know," observed Sir Tito Tumb, quite wisely.

"You could give him his pension," urged Mayrose.

"No, believe me, that is quite impossible," said Mr. Paramount, firmly; "it is contrary to all party etiquette and to administrative expediency for one set of Ministers to reverse the decisions of their predecessors. If a wrong has been sanctioned—which I am far from admitting—the moral responsibility must rest on those who committed it; and we must strive to avoid falling into like errors ourselves. But we can do no more."

"Think what a precedent it would be if we took to reviewing cases! Downing street would be full with men with grievances!" ejaculated little Sir Tito Tumb, aghast.

"Well, then, I must ask you to accept my resignation," said Mayrose, with resolution and deference. "If I were at issue with Lord Albert I would, of course, yield to his superior judgment; but I see no reason for yielding to Mr. Keane-Midge. Lord Albert and I are responsible to Parliament for the conduct of a department over which we have no virtual authority; that is the fact of it, and this situation appears to me unprofitable for all concerned. It is chiefly unfair to the public, whose pay I am receiving under false pretences."

"I think Mayrose has made out a case of personal hardship to himself," intervened sunny Lord Rosemary, who had not spoken as yet, and whose tone now con-

vinced Mayrose—and Mr. Paramount, too, probably—that he was not expressing ideas of his own, but reciting a lesson suggested him by his wife. “Is there no way of arranging matters? If we let Mr. Marvell’s case drop Mr. Midge might be advised to be more pliable on other matters, or, as he has served long, he might consent to retire with honours—perhaps a baronetcy.”

“If the other side were in they would get out of the difficulty by making Midge a Peer,” squeaked Sir Tito Tumb.

“Yes, when a man is fractious or incapable in other walks of life, they put him into our House, which they look upon as their Hospital for Incurables,” echoed Lord Beaujolais, showing his white teeth.

“I hope there will be some way of arranging matters,” observed Mr. Paramount, not too supplicatingly, but with friendly appeal. “We must ask you to relinquish Mr. Marvell’s case, Mayrose, because we have really no power over it; but as to the rest, authority is never conquered in a day, and you will find Mr. Midge obliged to yield in time on all points that may be reasonable. If you retired now it would look as if he had beaten you.”

“Oh, of course, he won’t retire,” exclaimed Beaujolais, breezily, and obeying a telegraphic glance from Mr. Paramount, he linked his arm in Mayrose’s and drew him amicably towards the door. Mayrose would have liked to stand on his dignity and renew an ultimatum, but Sir Tito Tumb, Lord Balbe, and Lord Rosemary seemed all intent on hustling him affectionately out of the room, and in a moment he found himself at the bottom of the Premier’s staircase and going out with Lord Beaujolais to the latter’s phaeton. “Come and lunch with my wife—she wants to talk to you about this affair,” said the Earl, gathering up his reins. “Women are the best steerers in the world in straits like yours. The mare looks frisky to-day, John—let go!” and the phaeton started.

The fact is, Mr. Paramount and his colleagues were naturally averse from seeing Mayrose resign; for his so doing would have aroused public discussion of a kind which is weakening to any Ministry, and especially to a new one. Mayrose had entered office with a great flourish of trumpets, and his manner of answering questions in the House of Lords had won him golden opinions from those who augur of a statesman’s future by his mode of replying yea or nay; all, indeed, who had credited Mr. Paramount with sagacity for unearthing Mayrose had been amply confirmed in their good estimates. But now if this promising young Peer retired, questions would be asked; and when it became known that he had thrown up his place because his attempts to introduce reforms and redress a grievance were thwarted by an irresponsible red-tapeist, people would energetically take his part, and a great deal of awkward popularity would centre round him. This was the more undesirable, as times were growing difficult, and it was important that Mr. Paramount’s team should appear to go well together. Mr. Paradyse had, after his great defeat, promptly threatened to resign the leadership of the Opposition just as a cook vows to pull off her apron if she is scolded for having miscooked the goose; but the Opposition, having meekly agreed not to scold Mr. Paradyse for miscooking their goose, that earnest man had resumed his post, and his followers were fast reuniting for one of those onslaughts against standing laws and customs which are called policy. And, of course, all the chronic malcontents in the kingdom, who had risen to be a first-class power since the ballot had enabled them to shift from side to side undetected, were joining the Opposition too. There was the Tobacco interest, who, not satisfied with being allowed to sell spurious cigars for genuine unmolested, wanted to be relieved of patents and duty altogether, and the Unwashed Association, who were for a total repeal of the soap tax; and that Shaker Brotherhood who, starting from the idea that a National Church should open its doors to worship of all denominations, had at length succeeded in convincing Mr. Paradyse that the Shakers should be suffered to hold their dances in some part of the parish churches, if only in the vestry; and, lastly, there were the Scotch, the Welsh, and the people of the Isle of Wight, who clamoured for Home Rule. This latter item of policy was indeed getting to be so pressing that it was merely a question as to whether Mr. Paramount should introduce a Home Rule Bill on the ground that it was a Conservative measure tending to bring us back to the prac-

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

All these reasons, which militated against Mayrose's desertion, were not enumerated by Lord Beaujolais, for his lordship was more versed in the management of horses and dogs than of men, and his wife had apparently instructed him to leave the arguing to her. There are husbands who would be little without their wives, and though Lord Beaujolais plumed himself on treating all women as toys, he would have brought himself into strange fixes had not his wife skilfully diverted him from the illogical schemes into which he was being constantly hurried by his exuberant vitality. This she did by convincing him that her amendments to his ideas were all happy thoughts of his own; else Lord Beaujolais would have become obstreperous and resisted. At present, conceiving that he had been ill-used in getting the Royal Beagles to keep instead of the Buckhounds, he had set his mind on being compensated with the next Garter and a Marquisate, but his wife was busy persuading him that as Marquisate and Garter must come to him in due course, he had much better exert his influence to obtain Secretaryships of Legation and Royal A. D. Caships for her brothers, who were numerous. The *pros* and *cons* of this many-sided question were the topics which Lord Beaujolais chose for examining as he whirled Mayrose towards Belgravia, in a style of driving most consummate. His phaeton was a miracle of lightness, and with its blue body picked out in white, with wheel-naves, pole-hook, and hind-box rails of silver, looked one of those perfect, flashing things that must be seen to be understood. Then how do justice to Lord Beaujolais' method of pulling up his eight-hundred-guinea team, so that they advanced not one inch beyond their proper post at his door, whilst the two grooms, in their claret liveries with scarlet collars, scrambled down to be at the horses' heads at the moment they stopped? Let us be grateful that every man on earth has his uses. We cannot all of us solve the squaring of the circle, nor even a simple equation; but to reign up a phaeton correctly is as intricate a problem as many others.

"See, my dear, I have brought you our young Tartar," exclaimed Lord Beaujolais, ushering Mayrose into his wife's pink and white boudoir. "He actually threatened to throw Australia at their heads!"

"Oh, Lord Mayrose must not do anything so high-spirited," said blonde Lady Beaujolais, smiling, and holding out a little hand gemmed as an Italian Madonna's. "Sit down here by me, Lord Mayrose. Do you know you have set all the world talking of your ungovernable character?"

"I am the most governable man alive, Lady Beaujolais."

"But he mustn't be ridden on the curb," laughed the Earl, taking up a little mite of three years old, who sat beside her mother on an ottoman, playing with one of those satisfactory doll-houses which cost about as much to maintain as the real households of those who manufacture them. Mayrose instantly went to the mother's heart by lifting this little thing in his turn when her father had released her. He kissed her and set her on his knee. "I met Lucy at the Zoological last Sunday, and I am afraid we spoiled the ugliest monkey in the collection by too many buns."

"Lucy is in great trouble to-day," said Lady Beaujolais, beaming with her limpid eyes at them both. "Her brother took her doll's best silk dress to cut out neck-ties for the crew of his toy-ship, and he is in disgrace for it. But it's dinner time, Lucy; and here's nurse come for you. Say good-bye, there's a dear child."

"I think Lucy could govern me pretty easily," remarked Mayrose when the little mite had toddled off, kissing her dimpled fist to him from the doorway.

"Anybody could govern you, and I am sure that Mr. Midge is a horrid old man," assented Lady Beaujolais, with conviction. "But see how necessary it is to be on good terms with him. Hasn't he actually been saying that you took up

Mr. Marvell's case because there was a Miss Marvell, very handsome, who was under your intimate protection!"

"And you would wish me to keep on good terms with such a man as that!" exclaimed Mayrose, with the blood mounting to his face. "Why, it's a most impudent falsehood! I saw Miss Marvell once during half an hour in my Secretary's presence."

"Oh! I didn't believe it, you may be sure; but the Midges are very powerful; they are the cousins to the Rodents and the Keane Foresters, and allied in many ways to the Drones. Then, you must own that when people have an enemy they always do speak hardly of him. If I had an enemy I should say all sorts of cruel things, because I should think them true."

"You would make certain that they were true, I know."

"Well, I hope so: but I wouldn't answer for myself," laughed the Countess, who was engaged on a piece of tapestry that was to serve for nothing and nobody in particular. "The Midges and the Rodents, and all their friends, were terribly angry with you, and it began all of a sudden. A fortnight ago they sang your praises everywhere; then it was as if you had done something fearfully wicked. As my husband says, they are like people dancing in a ring, and when you push one you disturb them all."

"I don't think I should mind disturbing them, Lady Beaujolais."

"He would disturb them and brave them, by Jove!" exclaimed the Earl, who had got a newspaper and was reading the advertisements of lost dogs, his favourite intellectual pastime. "Tell him, Alice, he wants to go to war with a lot of wasps."

"They certainly are like wasps sometimes, and it could do you no good to brave them," continued Lady Beaujolais, shaking her pretty head. "All you would gain would be a day's popularity with cheap newspapers and noisy disagreeable people; and this is of no use to a Peer. If you were in the House of Commons popularity might, of course, be an object."

"I never looked at the profits of the question, believe me."

"Oh, but you should look to the profits of everything, because the world is made so," protested Lady Beaujolais, who, like all pretty women with blonde hair and blue eyes, had no distaste for philosophical aphorisms. "You see a Peer and a Commoner are quite different, and if you resigned it would be said you were wilful, and had betrayed your party, and you would never be employed again—never. Shall I tell you now how to triumph over all your enemies and make quite sure of becoming a great man?"

"Please do. Such recipes are worth having."

"Well, you must keep your place to begin with, and then marry—marry some one with a great deal of money. Oh, I know what you are going to say," broke off Lady Beaujolais, holding up her needle gaily to check him, and speaking faster. "But let me explain. A Peer can do nothing without being very rich; and if you became a great landowner and had large influence, you might defy all the Midges and their friends. There are many of us who think that they and the Rodents and the Keane-Foresters are always having more than their share of the good things; and I am sure I cannot understand why Mr. Paramount gave them all the best posts at Court which other people expected. Lady Coralmere thinks as I do, and she will inherit all her husband's lands at his death; Lady Rosemary, I know, dislikes all the Midges, so that we might make quite a strong cabal round you, and by-and-bye—after Mr. Paramount—you might get the party-leadership, and become Prime Minister."

"That is looking very far ahead," laughed Mayrose, reddening a little.

"One can never look too far," maintained the winsome Countess, seriously. "Prime Ministers must be either adventurous Commoners or rich Peers of talent. Now, you have the talent to become anything you please, and all you require is the riches. I am sure," added she, with a sly glance at him, as she snapped a scarlet wool, "my recipe for obtaining them is not so very bitter; some men might think it sweet."

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and he would like to see the pudding first," said Lord Beaujolais. "But you have only to cast about you, Mayrose; there are plenty to be had for the asking."

As if to furnish a speaking commentary to the Earl's words, a footman's three-volleyed knock resounded at the house door, and shortly afterwards Lady Coralmer was introduced, bringing in all the smiles and bloom of spring with her. Dark-haired, and of a complexion that was best set off by that colour which the French style *le fard des brunes*, she wore a dress and bonnet in which the hue of the primrose dominated, violet being the colour that was blended with the primrose, so that the whole formed the very ideal of fresh attire for a May morning. Lady Coralmer was one of those few English ladies who can be trusted to dress according to their own taste, and not after that of their milliners; even Mr. Girth, of Paris, admitted that she required no tutoring.

"My dear Alice, I have called to ask you for some luncheon," she said, embracing Lady Beaujolais; then turning to Mayrose, with that grace to which the English practice of hand-shaking can lend such a cordial charm, though it is an ugly practice at ordinary times—"it is weeks since we have met, Lord Mayrose."

"I was told you had gone to Nice, and am well pleased to see you home."

"Thanks. I only returned the other day. I went to bring back Lord Coralmer, who had been wintering at Monte Carlo."

"I hope Coralmer is better," said Lord Beaujolais.

"I am sorry to say he is not well at all. English climate does not suit him, and I much wished him to stay in France; but he dislikes being treated as an invalid, and insists upon having his own way."

Lady Coralmer sighed, whilst her friend and the two gentlemen assumed that air of commiseration which befits in speaking of an old gentleman whose days are supposed to be numbered. It will be remembered that Lord Coralmer was that hard-lived Peer, who had long been despaired of by the Faculty, but who persisted in surviving season after season, despite his being deaf, paralytic, and loaded with other infirmities enough to have kept the whole House of Lords in bed if distributed piecemeal among them. His wife was known to behave most kindly to him, but he would have none of her ministrations; and the sigh she heaved, as if to prognosticate her approaching widowhood, was naturally very sincere, though, to be sure, it consorted ill with her primrose adjustments and general air of radiancy. After the sigh there was a moment's silence, which Lady Beaujolais broke by leading off her friend to remove her bonnet, and then the two gentlemen remained alone.

"Coralmer will not live three months more; the doctors have declared it for certain," remarked Lord Beaujolais, with his back to the fireplace. His widow will be a great catch. Dolly Drone would like to marry her."

"I suppose there will be nothing to baulk Dolly Drone."

"Well, Lady Coralmer will be able to afford marrying for love, and it's certainly not Dolly she would prefer. The Coralmer property isn't entailed, and the Earl seems to have bequeathed her every stick and stone—forty thousand a year, they say."

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOME MUTUAL STUDYING.

Now, this was a broad hint. Though no coxcomb, Mayrose was not so simple as to require that every i should be plainly dotted for him, and he could read, like many others, the language that is conveyed in the glance and manner of women. There was no doubt that Lady Coralmer looked upon him with favour, and that he could step at once into the proud position of waiting for the Earl of Coralmer's shoes, if he chose. It was evident, too, that both Lord and Lady Beaujolais thought that he would do well to avail himself of this first-class opportunity without delay, for where would he find a wife so well fitted to adorn his house, so capable of furthering his ambition, so rich, graceful, lovable, and appreciative? It is better, in many cases, for an ambitious rising man to marry a young widow than a girl. Lady Coralmer would not have to conquer a position in society, to spend

years gathering a coterie, and making of her drawing-room a place of repair for potent people. She was already at the head of a coterie, her drawing-room was renowned, and her husband's cook famous, and if Mayrose married her he would inherit not only Lord Coralmere's fortune, territorial power, and cook, but the social influence which his wife had amassed. It would be no mean thing either to have for his helpmate a loving woman whose vivacious character was of the sort that knows no obstacles.

Unusual as the fact is among ladies, Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere really loved each other; and if one adds to this the innate passion which ladies have for making matches, even between persons whom Heaven never intended should be joined together, one may sympathize with Lady Beaujolais' ardour for uniting a pair who were suited to each other in every way. The conversation at luncheon seemed to have no other object than to draw out Lady Coralmere's qualities, wit, expectations, and friendly feelings towards Mayrose; yet this was done without effort, and Lady Coralmere never appeared to play a part that was otherwise than reserved and womanly. Only, when the subject of Mayrose's official difficulties came up, it would have soothed any man to hear the brilliant Countess compassionate the petty miseries that beset all noble-minded men in their attempts to do good; and she adverted to Mr. Keane-Midge and his clique as to a base troop who should be crushed under heel at the first favourable occasion—saying which, she made a little gesture with her hand as if it would give her no displeasure to crush them personally. Then by-and-bye there came a covert allusion—referring to Zellie Carol, and only meant to be understood of Mayrose—to women who have not the sense to discern the future of a man of genius, and prefer for the sake of temporary lustre to link their destinies to rich nonentities; and all this was most balmy to hear. The luncheon was in fact convivial, and at the end of it, Lord Beaujolais, having withdrawn a moment to fetch the model of an invention he was going to patent—an invention for bringing runaway traps to a standstill by unhooking the traces, pole, or shafts, by means of a spring to be placed near the driver's side—Lady Beaujolais asked to be excused a minute, too, whilst she ran up to the nursery to see how her children had dined. Then Mayrose and Lady Coralmere were left together; but there was no embarrassing silence, for the Countess, making one of those charming movements by which ladies pretend to adjust a coil of hair, and so display a tiny hand, pink ear, and the beauty of their hair all at the same time, said gently—

"I was very sorry to hear of the annoyances that had been heaped upon you, Lord Mayrose; but do not resign, for a man should combat wicked people to the end."

"My annoyances seem real godsend to me, now that they have won me so many expressions of goodwill," answered Mayrose, gallantly.

"One cannot help feeling interest in anyone who wants to do good," answered the Countess, toying with a fringe of her violet and primrose dress; "but if I can ever help you with advice, I hope you will call on me, for I know a great many of the Midges and Rodents, and might assist you in thwarting them." I shall be much at home, now that my poor husband is, I fear, very near his end."

Here there was another sigh, and Mayrose promised to call. Then Lady Beaujolais reappeared; and in half an hour more Mayrose took his leave of the ladies, and was driven back by Lord Beaujolais to Westminster. But though he diplomatically parted with Lady Coralmere on such terms as to retain her friendship by keeping her hopes alive, it may be said at once that he had no purpose of marrying her; and this may seem the more surprising as he had arrived at Lady Beaujolais' conclusion that the sooner he got married the better. Yes; his short experience of official life had convinced him that he should rise to no power or dignity without money, and that the mere fact of his having undertaken a war with a cohort of families like the Midges would be a stumbling block to him all his life through, if he could not triumph by the prestige of property and influence. Property to a peer, dash and genius to a commoner—these, as Lady Beaujolais had said, seemed to be essentials of success, and Mayrose wished to succeed; nor had the Countess' hint that he might attain to the most commanding station by the aid

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of wealth been thrown away upon him. When is a young man worth his salt ever devoid of ambition? And where is the ambitious man who, having once got into the arcana of officialism, and seen for himself how little genius it requires to climb high there, has not said to himself that he, too, might reach a pinnacle? Then, as regards love in marriage, Mayrose's first love romance was at an end, for Zellie had discarded him in favour of a man of money; and so long as he found an attractive woman of congenial temper, that was all he now cared for or could expect. He would devote himself to his wife, whoever she were; but, being no longer able to offer a first and whole-hearted love, he could afford to make of marriage a business like they do abroad. As though to confirm him in his new projects, a hazard brought him in the way of receiving an apparent slight from Zellie, for, as Lord Beaujolais was driving past Hyde Park, the phaeton crossed Lady Rosemary's barouche. The Countess acknowledged Mayrose's bow with the affectionate smile which no events seemed able to alter, but Zellie reddened bending her head rather to Lord Beaujolais than to him, and Violet cut him dead. "Violet's behaviour is a mystery to me," he mused, innocently, though with a blush on his face. "I suppose she is still angry because I do not call."

But whom did Mayrose think of marrying? Well, riding along beside Lord Beaujolais, he had in his pocket an invitation to dine with Sir Ham Pennywoddle, and he had written in the morning to accept. In the course of the last few days a rapid change had come over his views about the Knight, and especially about Mary, for whilst prosecuting his inquiries about the Marvell case he had learned from Quilpin Leech how that Mary Pennywoddle was acting as a Providence to the Marvells, and, furthermore, that Sir Ham was not only determined to bring the aggrieved man's wrongs before Parliament, but to pay him a sufficient income out of his own pocket if Government declined to give him his pension. Mayrose and the Knight had exchanged a civil correspondence respecting the latter's intention to ask a question previously of Lord Balbie; and in the Surrey street house, which Mayrose had privately visited to obtain fuller particulars about the "grievance," &c., he had accidentally met Mary, who had talked with such honest good sense and kind-heartedness that he had been at first surprised, then touched, having previously deemed that Miss Pennywoddle must be a conceited little person, too much puffed up by her father's wealth to care for other people's woes. If Mary had displayed any alacrity to renew the acquaintance begun in the Camelia house, Mayrose might have been on his guard, but on the contrary, he was struck by her coldness when not actually discussing Mr. Marvell's affairs, and this—such is human nature—had attracted him. Disgusted and angry at the maze of quibbling and malice in which he had got involved, he mentally argued that to have reared such a true-minded daughter as Mary, the Knight and his wife must be worthy people in the main; and thence to reflecting that he could, if he pleased, win back through Mary all the lands which his father had lost, the distance was not far. He even meditated, with that casuistry which the devil serves up so handy in such junctures, whether if he married for money it was not his bounden duty to marry so as to get back the patrimony of his ancestors, for then he should not be simply advancing his own prospects, but performing an act which would in some manner be one of filial piety. This is why he had lent a willing ear to Lady Beaujolais' advice in so far as regarded the propriety of marrying, though he had not grasped the fact that her ladyship connected all ideas of his rise with the condition of his marrying her particular friend, Lady Coralmere. However, Mayrose had not made up his mind.

In the Lords' waiting-room Mayrose was accosted by Lord Rosemary, who, with the most conciliatory of peach-like chins dimpling over his white waistcoat, handed him a note, in which the Countess adjured him earnestly, for her sake, not to resign. In the lobbies Lord Balbie Drone and little Sir Tito Tumb also renewed their entreaties, and in such flattering terms that, without absolutely yielding, Mayrose agreed to strike a truce with Mr. Keane-Midge. If he could have known that from the moment when a Government subaltern threatens resignation he is a marked man, who will be got rid of on the first occasion when it can be made to appear that he is in the wrong, he would have been careful to make some terms before he consented to this truce. But this came of having no woman well versed

in the ways of the world to advise him. There was no business of importance before the House that afternoon, so after making one of an audience of four peers temporal and one spiritual, who sat and yawned whilst a noble lord prosed over an ecclesiastical bill, he went to give a few signatures at the Australia Office, and thence repaired home. He dressed with an unusual care, which pricked his valet's curiosity, and at half-past seven drove to the Knight's residence, wondering now the dinner would go off, and whether Mary Pennywoddle would really bear the close study he proposed to bestow on her.

Sir Ham's town mansion, like his country house, had been admirably built by an architect who knew his business. It was costly, tasteful, and luxurious, enriched with exotics and marble statuettes, strewn with thick-pile carpets of the most finished designs, and filled with French furniture, quilted and moulded to fit every posture of the human form. It differed from the palaces of ancient families in that every new production of art, science, and literature were to be found in it. A newly-invented game, a recently patented fire-screen, the latest waltz, the last three-volume novel, all wended their way thither; and here, perhaps, an author may be allowed humbly to observe that it is the *nouveaux riches* who are the best patrons of literature. They it is, and not the descendants of the Norman conqueror—if such there be among us—who distinguish themselves by purchasing novels at 81s. 6d.

Mayrose was shown into a gorgeous mauve drawing-room, where there were assembled Sir Ham and his lady, Mary, Grace Marvell, and Mr. Quintus Dexter, who had now taken such a footing in the house as Sir Ham's counsellor—even in oyster-shell affairs—that he might almost be counted as a permanent lodger. Grace Marvell, who seemed to have established a footing, too, was dressed in black, so as not to contrast with the mourning of the household, and it was understood that this was to be a quiet family dinner, such as mourning admits of—which, however, had not precluded Sir Ham from hiring a French *chef*, five foot high without his flat cap, but terribly tall in importance, nor Lady Pennywoddle from spending the major part of her day receiving orders from this magnificent being. The Knight appeared to have gained new life and to have diminished by a few pounds' weight in his proud excitement at Mayrose's coming; Lady Pennywoddle, with black grapes in her hair, and an over-sized ebony fan in her hands, looked the picture of heat, and was secretly trembling lest some of Heaven's fire should fall, owing to the wastefulness of that haughty Frenchman, who had asked for the breasts of six spring chickens to make one tureen of soup. As for Mary she was a little pale and nervous. She wore a low bodiced black dress with jet ornaments, and no relief but one white rose with black leaves in her hair, and this might explain her pallor. But why was she nervous? "And," thought Mayrose as he made his bow to her, "why does she seem so much taken up with Quintus Dexter?"

It was becoming that she should seem taken up with Mr. Dexter during dinner, for it was that gentleman who sat next her at table, Mayrose having, of course, led in Lady Pennywoddle. But the table was round, and Mayrose had Mary on his right, so that he had many opportunities of trying to entice her into conversation. He failed, however, to draw anything but polite answers to his own questions, without eliciting from her any spontaneous remark; and, judging of the daughter by the mother, he was fain to conclude at last—though not without hesitation,—that it was the overpowering circumstance of his being a lord which made Mary so much more shy with him than with Mr. Dexter. He may be excused for this piece of presumption, as both her ladyship and Sir Ham "my lorded" and "your lordshipped" him till one might have thought these words were like large lollypops, which having once got into their mouths, took a long time to melt; but his mistake did not last beyond the entrees. At this stage, when the fat butler was saying to him, "Hermitage or Johannisberg, my lord?" the simpler solution occurred to him that Mr. Dexter and Miss Mary were in love with each other; and once he had imagined this, a little watching deluded him into the belief that he was correct; so that he reached the end of dinner in as abashed a frame of mind as could well be. His inward verdict was that it served him right. He had come into this house as a common decoyer, and would now go his ways, feeling that he had not that Sultanlike prerogative of flinging his handkerchief to any girl he

pleased and getting her to pick it up. In proportion as his mortifications based him so as a natural consequence did it raise Sir Ham and Mary in his esteem. They were not schaming persons who wanted anything of him, but friendly neighbours whom he had long and with much vanity misjudged.

It was a bitter pill to swallow, but he gulped it down bravely, and, trying to make honourable amends for his prejudices and miscalculations, he began to converse with the worthy Knight and his wife in a tone of such consideration and friendliness that it insensibly happened that he who had come to study Mary was by her studied, and with curious attention. The precise moment at which it dawned on Mary that there was something worth listening to in Mayrose's remarks—something worth observing in his voice and manner—can scarcely be conjectured. But there was such a moment, and in the drawing-room after dinner Mayrose could not help noticing that Mary's demeanour towards him was not what it had been before.

She was sitting on the sofa beside her mother, and the rest of the party disposed themselves in a circle round the fire, so that the conversation became general. Hitherto no allusion had been made to Mr. Marvell's case, but now Sir Ham, loquacious with satisfaction and wine, said :—

"My lord, I had it on the sly like from one of the members that you had threatened to resign your place because of poor Marvell ; and I'm sure Grace and all of us here think your behaviour very handsome. A place worth fifteen hundred a year, Mary."

"Mary said nothing, but could not repress a look of approbation.

"I wish I had been more successful," said Mayrose, addressing Grace and the Knight, but not unobservant of the tacit applause which Mary had given. "I have not resigned, because I hope that by staying I may prevent the renewal of such acts of injustice. Mr. Marvell and I have been worsted by routine, but it may at least be a consolation to him that Lord Albert Drone privately admits that he has been wronged."

"My father and I are deeply indebted to you, Lord Mayrose," said Grace, in a clear, musical voice, quite free from any of the servility which ran in streaks through Sir Ham's and Lady Pennywoddle's utterances ; "and I cannot express my obligations to you, Sir Ham," added she, turning to the Knight, with an earnest look in her lovely eyes. She had been seated next Sir Ham at dinner, and he appeared to be already under a paternal thralldom to this fascinating girl who had come into his house as his daughter's friend, and added so much to the attractions of his fireside. Mayrose, who remembered the bit of scandal about which Lady Beaujolais had warned him, and who admired Grace's beauty without feeling a spark of any other attachment, bowed to her thanks with a touch of intentional punctiliousness. But Sir Ham laid a hand on one of her fair white shoulders, as he would have done on Mary's, and exclaimed :—

"There's no call for thankin' me, my dear ; I'll see your papa never wants for a good roof or a full meal, and of Lord Mayrose I'll put question on question in the House of Commons until all the Government gets sick o' hearing me."

"That would do no good now, Sir Ham," pleaded Mayrose ; "and I would rather ask you, for Mr. Marvell's sake, to let the case drop. If there is any hope left it is in keeping quiet and waiting."

"Well, routine will have another enemy in the field to-morrow, for the Reporter is coming out," ejaculated Mr. Dexter, buoyantly. "I suppose you have heard of our coming paper, Lord Mayrose ? I must go away early this evening to edit."

"Before you go, though, let's have some music," proposed the Knight, with an eye to his daughter's accomplishments. "Mary, my dear, t down to the pianer and sing his lordship something."

"Lord Mayrose will not care to hear any songs I can sing, papa," answered Mary simply ; adding, "Grace has a much better voice than I."

"I am sure you have a charming voice," protested Mr. Dexter ; "one of the sweetest drawing-room voices I have heard."

Now, if Mary and Mr. Dexter had been in love, Mary would have vouchsafed

some recognition to this little compliment, if only the slightest glance, but she made none. On the other hand, when Mayrose led her to the piano, his eyes met hers as he wound up the music stool, and she coloured. The ups and downs of courtship are furnished by such traits as these; and from the moment when Mary coloured Mayrose's hopes rallied. An hour wore on in the singing of homely ballads, which Mary and Grace rendered with notes and expression equally pure; and the evening finished by Mayrose learning that Mary and her mother were to keep stalls at a charity bazaar on the morrow, and by his saying somehow that he should come and visit them as a customer.

CHAPTER XXX.

MARY'S PERPLEXITIES.

Mayrose went home from this dinner with Sir Ham, resolved to conduct his courtship briskly. Relieved of his fear that Mary might have been won by Mr. Dexter, there was no reason why he should linger over a long process of love-making. He was never likely—at least not before marriage—to feel a warmer regard for Mary than he did at that moment, and every day lost in philandering might only serve to bring out some imperfections in Sir Ham which he would much rather ignore. When a man in an hour of pique takes a sudden determination which his conscience disapproves, he stifles conscience and goes ahead. Sir Ham and his wife seemed to Mayrose at present good-natured, worthy people; and Mary, it was clear, had inherited none of her parents' vulgarity, but was well educated and lady-like as well as pretty and cheerful. This was enough for all purposes of a *mariage de convenance*. After marriage Mary's primness would be crumpled out of her by contact with ladies like Lady Rosemary and Lady Beaujolais, who, Mayrose thought, would not refuse to take her in hand, and all would go well. This, then, was his plan—the plan of a man whom the Midges and Rodents had driven to look upon gold as the prime fruit on the tree of life.

On her side Mary passed the night in agitated thoughts. Accustomed to reason for herself and to guide her conduct without appealing for advice to her kindly but dull parents, she saw that she would soon reach a crisis in her life, and inquired of herself with torturing anxiety how she should act? She had long known that her father dreamed of marrying her to Mayrose. More blind than is usual with girls must she have been if she had failed to see through Sir Ham's transparent hints about the Peer's qualities, and the lustre of his ancient name; and now this evening had convinced her that Mayrose meant to feign, if he did not truly feel, an attachment for her. But her poor little heart ached when she called to mind Mr. Dexter's repeated insinuations about the young lord's poverty, and his notorious scheme of seeking a rich wife. Whilst seeming to praise Mayrose, the barrister had missed no occasion of saying things like this to his disparagement; he in fact, continually extolled him as an honourable man, but a keen fortune-hunter. Of course Mary knew that Mr. Dexter was himself a fortune-hunter, who wanted to become her husband for her dower's sake; but did this prove that he was not speaking the truth? Alas! why should she have been so much concerned about all this, and why should she have reflected with such heartburning on Mayrose's mercenariness, if it were not that from the hour when she had first seen him until the day when Mr. Dexter had begun to malign him she had pictured the lord of Springfield as her ideal of all that a man should be—knightly, generous, and loyal? Why should she have kept locked up among her little trinkets that camelia which he had given her, and why when many times sorely tempted to throw it away should her hand have always faltered? Why, too, sitting alone now at her bedside, in her quiet room, should she have drawn out the faded flower and held it in her hands, thinking wretchedly that in spite of all she loved the donor but too well? Her anger against him, her attempted contempt for him were love—and she could only pray that she might have strength to resist him if he came wooing her with a voice which was not that of sincere affection.

Mary was not prim then. When she lay down to rest the camelia was on her

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pil'ow, and over its shrivelled leaves many a tear trickled from eyes that tried in vain to sleep.

In the morning Mr. Dexter arrived at Sir Ham's house in high feather, and bringing the first published number of the *Reporter*. From what he could see, riding through the streets, the sale was brisk, especially among the passengers on the knife-boards of omnibuses—the class to whom spirited journalism must ever chiefly appeal. Pallid from having spent the whole night superintending the printing of his broadsheet, the editor spread the *Reporter* over a table in the breakfast-room, and Sir Ham, Lady Pennywoddle, Mary, and Grace stood round to admire, for it deserved admiration. It was vast as the largest of the existing dailies, nor was the paper flimsier than the low price actually required; indeed, the paper was itself a new experiment by a genius who had succeeded in manufacturing it out of bulrushes at a price much inferior to any previously known in the paper trade. The title was not printed in Gothic, for, as Mr. Dexter observed, the application of Gothic to things of modern invention was a British mania to be discouraged; reporting was a novel science, so the title was printed in the slimmest form of curved Roman, and a couple of quill pens crossed underneath, gave a smart look to the frontispiece. But the thing to see was the letterpress. Never before had so much law information been condensed into such a space, nor assorted in a way so appetising; one had only to read this delightful journal to burn instantly with a desire to be connected in some way with the law if only as defendant in a suit for trespass. There were four leaders indited by gentlemen who would have written well for nothing, but to whose style five guineas a column lent rare point and finish; and there was a brilliant pen-sketch of the Lord Chancellor, the first of a series which was to include all the judges (the author was himself a learned judge) and the prominent members of the Bar. Then there shone a letter from Paris, in which the current *causes celebres* were epitomised in a light style, copied from that which M. Jules Moineaux has made all his own in the *Charivari*, and similar ones from New York and Berlin, most sensational and enticing. Events non-legal formed but a slight feature in the paper; but in order that the buyers might know what was going on without being compelled to purchase any other journal, a column was devoted to summarising all the news—parliamentary, telegraphic, and social—which constitute the staple of other sheets. No journal in truth was ever started which bade fairer to outpace all the others in the esteem of our intelligent middle classes, for the law and police reports—the bulk and marrow of the paper—were got up on a scale quite unprecedented and unsurpassable.

"Well, now, this is what I call a noosepaper," muttered Sir Ham, as he stared at the sheet with a look of wonderstruck enthusiasm. "See, Mary, the London Police and County Courts take up five columns!"

"Yes; there was an old abuse flourishing which the *Reporter* will suppress," said Mr. Dexter, smoothing out the sheet complacently. "In the County Courts defendants could get their cases kept from the public by giving half a sovereign to the reporters; and in the Police Courts the reporters generally went away after two o'clock, so that the public heard nothing of the cases called after that hour. The *Reporter* will print the names of every person who comes before the courts in any way, even if it only gives them a line; and at the end of the year we will publish a supplement, with the names of all plaintiffs, defendants, and prisoners who have figured in law-courts during the twelvemonth. It will make a valuable index."

"Dang me, but you've grand ideas, Dexter," exclaimed the Knight, more and more enthusiastic; "three trials for murder, with descriptions of the prisoners—and one with a corduroy coat carried fainting out of Court, think of that, Mary and Grace, my dears."

"And three columns of divorces—deary me, Ham! How can so many bodies want to get divorced?" ejaculated good Lady Pennywoddle, in perplexity.

"You will quite dethrone the circulating libraries," observed Grace Marvell, who was standing beside Sir Ham, and pretending to share his gratification.

"I should not wonder if we did, Miss Marvell. The French and Americans are much ahead of us in descriptive reporting. They say 'the defendant, or prisoner, was a pretty little woman who wore a blue bonnet with moss roses, and who

looked terribly miserable whilst the witness was giving his evidence.' That's what the public like, and what ordinary English papers call trash. We shall be horribly abused for printing such trash, but everyone will read it; and there's not a judge, barrister or litigant but will buy the *Reporter*."

"Ah, and so will the city folk, Dexter; this is the sort of noospaper to read between business hours," said Sir Ham, turning over the damp sheet, and smelling it in his great contentment.

"Yes, but it's not all 'trash,'" continued Mr. Dexter, with a smirk. "See, Miss Marvell, here is the leader of which I spoke to you last night, hinting at Mr. Marvell's case, and dilating on the state of administrative law, or want of law."

Mayrose's connection with the Marvell case had strangely developed Mary's interest in it. "What have you said?" she asked rather eagerly.

"We have begun in this way," said Mr. Dexter, reading:—"It is rumoured that a high official in one of our State departments has come into collision with his subordinates under circumstances which would seem to indicate the necessity for an administrative tribunal, empowered to adjudicate on the grievances of civil servants," and we go on to give an outline of Mr. Marvell's case without mentioning names. I hope Lord Mayrose will not take the leader amiss; though we compliment him so heartily that the Midges are sure to be excited."

"You have complimented him!" echoed Mary, mechanically, and she took up the paper, whilst Grace said a few words of thanks to Mr. Dexter, and then turned to Sir Ham:—"I must thank you too, Sir Ham, again and again, for this new kindness; for the paper is chiefly yours, and would never have come to birth without your assistance."

"Hush, Grace, my dear!" said the honest knight, patting one of her white hands with his own dumpy fingers. "It's Dexter who must have all the credit of this; such a paper would never have riz out of my head."

"Miss Marvell is quite right, Sir Ham," interposed Mr. Dexter, gracefully, like one who makes a public speech; "and I take this opportunity here, in the presence of Lady Pennywoddle and of Miss Mary, of expressing my deep obligations to you. If this paper leads me to fortune, as I firmly believe it will, I can never forget that I shall owe everything to your generosity, and to the kind personal friendship which has made that generosity more precious." And he cordially grasped Sir Ham's hand.

The knight was as nearly being moved to shed a tear or two as he ever was in his life.

"Don't talk of obligations," Dexter," he wheezed, with his round face illumined; "I guess you'll soon pay back all I ever lent you, and then I'll be drawing profits from this here newspaper; so that you'll have been more precious to me in every way than I were to you. But now it's time for me to be off to the city. I'll come back this afternoon, Jane, to see you and the gals keep the stall at the bazaar. Shall you be there, Dexter?"

"I am afraid not," answered the new Editor. "I only came so early because I did not want the first number of our paper to reach you by post. But my time is going to be painfully valuable now. I have been up all night, and am going home now to breakfast—or supper—and bed."

"Deary me, Muster Dexter, you've not breakfasted!" exclaimed distressed Lady Pennywoddle, moving towards the bell, as if the Editor had announced that he had not eaten for a week; but Mr. Dexter declined all refreshment, and saying he would do his utmost to snatch an hour for the bazaar, he went off in Sir Ham's company, looking the picture of a man who has set his foot on the first rung of Fortune's ladder.

Mayrose had said that he would not fail to be at the bazaar, and Mary had not forgotten it. Whilst Lady Pennywoddle betook herself to an hour's emotional reading of the three columns of Divorce and the five of Police reports, Mary prepared with Grace for the fashionable and charitable work that was to devolve on her in the afternoon. The bazaar which was to be held in the Hanover Square Rooms was in aid of the funds of the Hospital for Gout and Plethora, and Lady Pennywoddle had been invited to take a refreshment stall. It was one of the

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emoluments of Sir Ham's position as M. P. that Lady Pennywoddle was enrolled as patroness of half a score of laudable charities ; but to none had she more willingly lent her name than to this one for the gouty and obese. To stand during the afternoon of three consecutive days and sell eatables would be to some ladies a tiresome pursuit, but to the knight's wife it was so much like a taste of halcyon days gone by that she had not been able to resist the temptation ; and had got over the fact of being in mourning by reasoning that the piety of the object made this sale akin to church-going. That fashionable sales are not much like church-going is known to the initiated ; but this was Lady Pennywoddle's first bazaar, and it was also Mary's, who had looked forward to the charity-trading with almost as much enjoyment as her mother. One of those gentlewomen who patronize city ladies, by presenting them at Court, proffering them good advice and sometimes accepting substantial tokens in return, had cautioned mother and daughter that they would have nothing to do but to sell diligently and give no change ; and she had relieved them of trouble by ordering her own confectioner to fit them up a stall with full stock—she undertaking to pay that confectioner with a very liberal cheque which Sir Ham signed. So Mary's preparations consisted merely in getting ready some business-like looking ledgers, in which she and Grace, who was to sell too, would keep their accounts by double entry.

But she had to dress, and make herself smart in a new gown and bonnet ; and in doing so she thought how much lighter her heart would have been if Mayrose had not mentioned that he would be at this bazaar. Yet did she regret his purpose of being there ? she was not vain, and few girls could have had so comely a face without being conscious of it ; but to-day she examined herself in the glass, turning to see how her dress fitted her, adjusting her bonnet, and finally gazing intently into her own hazel eyes. Then she blushed. Her first impulse had been : "What could he see in me to admire, except my money ? If he were not mercenary he would fall in love with some one who is really beautiful—say Grace—who would make just the wife for a peer." But her glass sent back the reply that brought up the blush, for the glass said that there are many forms of beauty, and that hers was no face to be despised by a man. Then, ingenious at mistrusting her own charms, she inquired of herself when Mayrose could have had time to form a true attachment for her—as if time had been needed for her to form her private estimate of him ! Very conflicting and cruel were the impulses which turn by turn held sway in her little brain ; but the conclusion was always this—to watch and wait. Mr. Dexter would be coming more seldom now that he was busy, and her mind would not be prejudiced by the spiteful things he was accustomed to say covertly. If she saw Mayrose at the bazaar this afternoon, and if he spoke to her, she would answer with reserve, and nothing decisive could hap of the few words that might pass between them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT THE BAZAAR.

The Bazaar in aid of the Gouty and Plethoric drew all fashionable London to the Hanover-Square Rooms. It did not promise to be so grand a one as that for the Indigent Palé, at which the beautiful Duchess of Newmarket had sold a thousand guineas' worth of button-hole flowers—price of each flower £5 to £20—but it was as full of animation as any gouty man could have desired. If there were no duchesses among the patronesses there was a Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere, who were to keep, the first a cigar-store, the second a glove-shop ; and a sprinkling of pretty wives of stockbrokers, the choicest flowers of that fine hotbed which lies east of Temple Bar. The statue of William Pitt, which graces the square, could look down with comfort upon a treble row of carriages stretching as far as Regent-street on one side, and down to St. George's on the other. But here one question. We ventured to allude, in an earlier chapter, to the condition of the garden of New Square, Lincoln's Inn, into which no learned denizen of the square was ever seen to enter for either meditation or exercise, but which is nevertheless jealously fenced

round and rendered useless. The same remark applies to the Hanover-Square garden. No inhabitant uses it, no nursemaid, child, or member of the Oriental Club ever treads its gravel walks, and there it stands, a secluded piece of waste ground, which might be converted into a gay public resting-place, but for some dog-in-the-manger interest—very British, selfish and absurd. Is there any reason why dogs in the manger should bark Londoners out of so many spots where Parisians would place flowers and chairs to make decent people welcome?

Mayrose arrived at the Bazaar towards four o'clock, whilst the throng was at its full pressure. He was in a somewhat annoyed frame of mind, for the leader which Mr. Dexter had inserted in the *Reporter* had scandalized not only Mr. Keane-Midge and Lord Balbie Drone, but also Mr. Paramount, and the other members of the Cabinet, all of whom had concluded that the noxious comments must have been inspired by Mayrose himself. Lord Beaujolais had been hurriedly sent to remonstrate with him on the impropriety of setting newspapers to divulge the secrets of his own department; and though Mayrose had established his innocence to the Earl's satisfaction, he was not sure that he had done so to the satisfaction of Mr. Paramount, and was very angry at Mr. Dexter's officiousness. Having engaged to observe a truce with Mr. Keane-Midge, he was anxious to keep his word—that is, at least, until he could resume the warfare at his own hour, and with assured chance of success.

A pert frown he received from one crimp-haired Lady Lottie Midge, who had a grand photograph stall, the first as you went into the room, served to show him into what a pretty social mess he would get himself if he did not act prudently. Lady Lottie had been very civil to him on his introduction to her, but for some days past she and other ladies of her circle had shown him a cold front wherever he went. The fact is, every article of apparel on Lady Lottie, every coat and dress her kinsfolk wore, every joint they had ever eaten, every bottle of wine they had ever uncorked, had been paid for out of the public taxes for these many generations past, and she was naturally strenuous in desiring that this state of things should continue. She was young and handsome, too, and could fight with spirit, like a beautiful young bantam hen.

"So you mean to disappoint all the good opinions we had formed of you, and to be fractious and disagreeable," she began, with a pronounced pout, as Mayrose lifted his hat and asked her for a photograph.

"Disagreeable, Lady Charlotte? Certainly not to you."

"Oh, yes! Those who quarrel with my friends quarrel with me. And I can't imagine, either, what possessed you to be ill-natured to one who always spoke so kindly of you as Mr. Midge did. He's my uncle, as you well know."

"Supposing you forgive me, and sell me a photograph."

"Whose photograph?"

"Your own, if you don't look angry in it."

"No. I am smiling in my photographs, and that's why you sha'n't have one, because I am more offended than you think. You might have been the most popular man in London with all us ladies, and you preferred to be praised by vulgar newspapers which cost a penny."

"Well, I feel quite criminal, but give me one of your smiling photographs and I'll amend."

"Will you truly, though? Mind, we are in real earnest, and we shall all be watching you until we see you are quite peaceable and good again."

He smiled, and with a little rap on the fingers, she gave him one of her vignettes, for which he returned a bank note. He was too handsome and too playful with women for them to hold him in rigour long, but unfortunately he could not banter all the women who might be in league against him, and so his amiable friend Lady Beaujolais presently warned him.

"I was glad to see you making friends with Lady Charlotte Midge," she said, taking his cigar-case and filling it with regalias; "but she is only one among a host quite as spiteful as herself. Please be prudent, and pacify all your enemies, till you have a wife to fight your battles for you."

"A fighting wife, Lady Beaujolais. That's a new view of wedded bliss."

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"It's what we are best fitted for, fighting our husband's quarrels. But go and buy some gloves of Lady Coralmer. I have sold more than a hundred pounds' worth of cigars since two, and want to be very busy, so that my subscription may be the biggest."

Every one knows that the triumph of charity-bazaaring is to hear one's name read out at the closing dinner, in connection with the biggest sale.

Lady Coralmer's stall was close to Lady Beaujolais', and was besieged by a flock of city clerks of the richer sort, who become partners by-and-bye, and who had left their counting-houses early, so as to bask in the rays of peeresses' eyes. These gentlemen had a legitimate ambition to be able to boast in Lombard-street that Lady This had bitten the end of a cigar off for them, that Lady That had pinned a rose in their button-hole, and that Lady So-and-So had fitted on a pair of gloves for them. Lady Coralmer, to further this ambition, had a velvet cushion on her counter, and gentlemen who were pleased to pay five pounds extra—as a printed notice informed them—could rest their elbows on the cushion whilst the fair Countess drew the gloves over their fingers and performed the task of buttoning with the daintiest of golden hooks. Mayrose bought a pair of straw-coloured gloves, but he did not embarrass Lady Coralmer by asking to have them put on for him, and was glad that the swarm of purchasers, among whom the Countess flitted so industriously in a dress of *cafe-au-lait* silk, gave him an excuse for not lingering more than a minute. Then he turned, looking for Lady Pennywoddle's stall.

The rooms were at that time crammed full. A loud band with a disheveled conductor was playing quadrilles, and all round the walls were stalls, from which the chink of gold and the laughs of buyers and sellers could be heard. Some ladies were shy, and did not dare to offer their wares till addressed; but most entered into the spirit of their parts, and enticed customers as the liveliest booth-keepers in fairs try to do. There was much drapery and tinsel about, much noise and heat, and shops for all tastes—a stationer's, a mock post-office, a sweet-meat stall, a florist, two or three perfumers, a plaything repository, and a peep-show, outside of which one of those agreeable mortals called "ladies' men" was strutting with a sugar-loaf hat and making a fool of himself. But as there is always, even in real affairs, some one stall to which buyers are drawn in larger shoals than to others, so Mayrose observed that the tide flowed mainly towards one particular corner where the crowd was black with men's hats. He followed and overheard a grey and rouged dame near him utter his name not civilly. She was saying "It's that girl, I believe, about whom Lord Mayrose made so much fuss—a Miss Marvell. They say he's quite mad about her; and I wonder how she can have the impudence to show herself here—brazen thing!" Elderly ladies are privileged to say a great many things to each other which it is not lawful to reprint, and this one, who was presumably of the Midge connection, added whisperings which made Mayrose's ears tingle and his cheeks flush. He had never been moved to any other admiration for Grace Marvell than he would have bestowed on a beautiful work of art. He thought her splendid, but soulless, and the scandal which the Midge had sought to throw like a slime on his exertions for her father disgusted and incensed him so that he would have cheerfully seen the slanderous old lady strangled. But one mustn't strangle people; and as Mayrose now guessed that the tide of black hats was eddying round Miss Marvell, he walked on, knowing he should see Mary near.

He did see Mary selling cakes quaintly enough at one end of the counter, of which Grace Marvell was the centre, the glory, the cynosure. Thick was the crush of applicants for sandwiches, biscuits, and glasses of liqueur at the hands of the lovely seller, and continuous the dropping of gold and the ruffling of bank-notes into the basket, over which abashed Lady Pennywoddle presided. Grace was arrayed in a dress of grey silk, trimmed with black lace, which Sir Ham had given her for this occasion, and here in her element among the admiring glances and compliments of men, and the envious looks of her own sex, she shone with a new beauty—elate and dazzling. But Mayrose liked her neither more nor less thus transformed than he had done before, and without pausing near her worked his way towards Mary. He had come for this. Pursuant to his object of courting.

Mary with all the speed compatible with good taste, he meant to speak to her and lead up to an opportunity for advancing his suit, even if he had to wait an hour for it. Chance so arranged it that when he reached Mary, her last customer—a diffident gentleman who had come here for a spree, and had blushing bought a bun—had just left her, and she was alone. She saw him and thought of retreating beside Grace, so that whatever he said might be in the hearing of them both; but he was too quick.

May I beg of you a glass of lemonade, Miss Pennywoddle? I must congratulate you on your stall being the most crowded of all."

"That's because of Miss Marvell," said Mary, who felt she was reddening and gave herself a countenance by rummaging among the lemonade bottles. "Dear me! I think I've mislaid the corkscrew."

"Don't trouble about it—anything else will do."

"Oh, no! here it is!" And with expert little hands Mary unwired the bottle, wound off the cork without any fizzing or spilling, and foamed all the contents into a large tumbler.

"That's masterly," said Mayrose, with a smile, and pushing a note over the counter. "I'll be bound Miss Marvell could not have done it so well."

"Grace can do most things better than I can; but waiting behind a counter comes natural to me. You know papa and mamma kept a shop." This she said with her lips set and a brave air, as if she fancied Mayrose would wince under the reminder. But he did not wince—only laughed.

"We are all traders. I sell sheep, corn and timber; other men sell their time and strength; and our friend Mr. Dexter has begun, I see, to sell his thoughts; but I wish he would leave me out of the market."

"How do you mean?" asked Mary. "I thought he had been praising you."

"So he has, but unasked; and he has made me spend an unpleasant morning."

Then in a chatty way, as if he made light of it, Mayrose recounted the little tribulations he was enduring on account of Mr. Marvell's case. Customers continued to cluster around Grace, and Mary and her suitor were left alone; he resting an elbow on the counter, and dangling his cane from the tips of his straw-coloured glove, she listening to him. She listened very intently, though she pretended to move about and arrange plates; and when Mayrose saw that her attention was wholly captivated, he broke off suddenly. "But all this cannot interest you; it's men's failing to talk about their worries."

"It interests me because of my friend Grace," murmured Mary. "I think what you did for her was extremely generous."

"I did nothing, and could do nothing. A man must have powerful friends to do good, and I am almost friendless. All I gained was to be accused of having taken up Mr. Marvell's case because I was in love with his daughter."

"Who insinuated that?" asked Mary, with an accent of surprise and indignation.

"The people who love to impute wrong motives, and they are many," said Mayrose carelessly. "I must expect worse knocks than that, though, before I am done, and I shall not always have somebody as ready to sympathize with me as you seem to be."

Now, when a man describes himself as friendless and needing sympathy he touches a chord that vibrates to the lowest depths of a loving woman's heart. Mayrose, a brilliant successful adventurer, such as Mr. Dexter portrayed him, and Mayrose a persecuted man, the butt of malignity and of slander, were not the same person at all, and with an instantaneous flash it broke upon Mary that all the reports as to Mayrose's rejection by Lady Azalea Carol might be untrue. It might be untrue that he had proposed to her; untrue that he had thought of her money, or anybody's money; untrue that he had ever harboured a thought but was pure and unselfish; and in that case his attentions to herself might be—oh, how precious! She stood there with her face pink from a rising emotion, and her eyes, lifted of a sudden, met his. One may recall spoken words, or explain away their sense, but there is no recalling a glance; and in that glance Mayrose read that if he appealed to Mary confidently, candidly, manfully, she would be his. That was all he aspired

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to for the present, for he could not pursue his confidential talk, nor push it to regular love-making, in this bazaar. So he stood up to go; but Providence shapes our course for us in ways there is no foreseeing. When Mary had thought that nothing much could come of the few words she might exchange with Mayrose at her counter she had left accidents out of calculation, and Mayrose was now doing the same. For just as he was preparing to make way for a customer who seemed desirous of refreshing himself, a sharp, snappish explosion resounded close to him, and a general start of alarm took place among the crowd. What had happened was this—The tradesmen who had stocked the toy-shop had supplied some of those sweet playthings which imitate steam-engines, and which occasionally diversify the amusement they cause in a nursery by blowing children's limbs off. One of these playful engines, with lighted stove and coal-tender, had been running gracefully up and down a miniature tram all the afternoon, and now, for no visible reason, went up with a bang, scattering a discharge of red ashes among the festoons and paper-flowers over the stall, so that an instant after the explosion the smell of smoke diffused itself, and a cry of "Fire!" was raised.

It was some booby who raised it; but boobies are the master-spirits of this life, and the customary effect of an immediate and hideous panic followed. Shrieks and shouts rent the air, men pushed roughly over women, women clung to men, dresses were torn, stalls overthrown, children trampled under foot, and a violent, frightful surge was made towards the door, which soon became blocked; so that if the flames had spread, scores of people must have been stifled. Crowds in fear of fire lose all courage or sense of shame. That women should do so is pardonable; but what shall be said of men—of Englishmen—out of whom one signal of danger suffices to scare all manhood? Mayrose was positively the only man in the room who without relinquishing his self-possession a moment, ran straight towards the spot where the explosion had occurred. In one look he took in the extent of the mischief, clambered on the stall—overturning toys and boxes with a fine crash—tore away the flaming draperies, threw them down, and, stamping on them with his feet, put out every spark. It was all done in a few seconds; and then Mayrose, in a ringing voice—the voice born for command—shouted: "Stop! All danger is over! There is no fire!"

He had to repeat his cry twice, but it was so firmly uttered that the crowd did stop. Then it was curious to hear how many men there were who could not understand what the alarm had been about, nor why they had been running—valiant hearts, who had not intended to fly, but had felt themselves "pushed." Rule General:—When a crowd of men run like hares they have always been pushed—no doubt by the women, whom they elbow out of the way. In fact, there was not much damage; the trampled children were only bruised, the ladies were more injured in attire than in person, and the sole burns were on Mayrose's coat and hands. He did not feel them at first, for he was concerned to lift the lady who had kept the toy-stall—and who, be it said, did not much thank him for saving her life and that of the building, for he had upset a pile of boxes on her cerise dress and torn it, besides committing the more brutal crime of causing her chignon to fall, so that the scantiness of her natural locks stood betrayed. He stooped to lift this affronted and fainting lady, and was humbly apologizing to her when Mary broke through the blanched but chattering throng, who were now clustering up with most valuable advice as to how one should behave in panics. She held a napkin steeped in water, and faltered, "Are you hurt, Lord Mayrose?"

Then he began to feel the smart, and looking at his gloves saw that they were blackened, and that his sleeves were charred.

"Oh! you are quite burned!" she exclaimed in terror, swathing his hands rapidly in the wet cloth, and doing so she murmured, "Oh! how brave and noble it was! You saved us all, and none of them are thanking you."

"Your thanks are more than enough," he whispered, abandoning his hands to her care.

She chafed his burns with trembling touch, but in a moment the opportune medical gentleman, who is always forthcoming at such junctures, bustled his way to the front, closely followed by a newspaper reporter. Learning the quality of

his patient, the medical gentleman was particular in impressing upon the reporter that his—the medical gentleman's—name was Dr. Smirkett, M. R. C. S. L.; then he examined the burns, and called chirpingly for some salad oil. The crowd, delighted to be of use to an ailing Peer, asked one another for salad oil, as if the liquid were one which it is usual to carry in coat pockets. As none could be had, however, Dr. Smirkett blandly insisted that the patient should be removed home forthwith under his superintendence. "I have a great experience in burns, your ladyship," he said, addressing Mary, whom he evidently took for Mayrose's wife.

Poor Mary, who was still holding the wet napkin in her hands, turned scarlet.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MAYROSE FLIGHTS HIS TROTH.

Dr. Smirkett's experience in burns kept Mayrose indoors for a week, and during that time the invalid received numerous visits; for the important service he had rendered in rescuing the Charity Bazaar from fire was more amply appreciated by the public press than it had been by the actual witnesses of his bravery. It often happens that events which seem small to bystanders are thus raised to their true proportions by persons who were not present. When a handful of Parisian ragamuffins stormed and captured the Bastille none of the spectators reckoned that this brawling affair would be magnified into an epic achievement to be celebrated throughout all ages; and it seems that the people in the *cafes* sipped their drinks as usual that day, attaching but little significance to the great thing which had occurred. So, *parva si magnis*, the persons at the Bazaar who had not thought much of seeing Mayrose climb on a stall, overturn a lady, and pull down a flaming yard of calico, were rather appalled to hear from their newspapers on the morrow what would have been their probable fate if Mayrose had let the yard of calico be. The newspapers did not exalt Mayrose's exploit into heroism; for a man is a hero when he saves something from a fire in course of raging, not when he prevents the fire from taking place at all, and gets scorched in the process. There was no talk of heroism, but enough was said to promote a fashionable flow of gratitude. All the husbands, fathers, and brothers of ladies who had kept stalls left cards in Berkeley Square, and Bino passed hours in running up the staircase with trays of three-cornered notes, flowers, and baskets of fruit sent by many of the ladies themselves. Need it be said that among the earliest arrivals was Sir Ham Pennywoddle, who took no time to declare that if it had not been for "your lordship" he should have been, at that present speaking, a widowed, childless man? He was quite sincere in his thanks, and looked altogether very profuse and fatherly sitting in a pair of new violet gloves, and with his sun-flowery whiskers disordered by the intensity of his feeling.

Mayrose was reclining in a long chair, and clothed in a white Algerian *burnous*, which concealed his right arm hanging in a sling, but left him free to use the other hand, which was covered with a large white glove, being burned too, but less so. His hair was cut short, and his moustache clipped, both having been considerably singed, so that he looked not unlike a wounded soldier in one of those well-kept private ambulances which ladies superintend. The table beside him was a-bloom with roses sweetly perfuming the old room, which was a study, and furnished in the heavy style of the Regency; and close to the roses lay several of the notes above mentioned, notably two very full of thanks and condolences from Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmer. On the opposite side of the table sat Quipin Leech, who had been writing replies from dictation; but when the Knight entered that youth received a hint to retire. Mayrose had planned that the first time he saw Sir Ham he would ask him for Mary's hand. He could do so with safety now, and delay would be useless.

This was on the morning after the bazaar, and Mayrose had conned over a multitude of little speeches he would make in preface to his request; but the matter was somehow broached without any preface. In a very few simple words the question was conveyed, and of course answered in the affirmative.

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"Mary's your'n, my lord, and I knew it 'ud be so," gushingly exclaimed the Knight, whose round face glad agitation painted a mulberry colour; then fixing a fat forefinger on his knee to emphasize what was coming next: "That first day when I spoke to you at poor Mike's burying, I felt you was the man whom I'd best like to marry Mary; and I don't mind saying that when I heard you was going to throw yourself away on that lady Zalea Carol, I took poorly to the notion, because, said I, 'He's worth better than that'; so that when the papers printed that your courting of Lady 'Zalea warnt true, I said, 'Good'll come of it!'"

"I fervently hope good will come of it, Sir Ham."

"Fifty thousand pun' a year is what Mary 'ud have if I died to-morrow!" continued the Knight, puffing out his words like whiffs of steam; but I ain't dead yet, and I fancy I can collect a goodish sum more before I go for you and Mary's children, my lord."

"Don't call me 'my lord' though."

"No that will be ridiculous now—so it will. What might your Christian name be?"

"My name is Frederick, but it's a longish name. Call me Mayrose."

"Aye; I like Mayrose better than Frederick," wheezed the Knight. "I had a clerk called Frederick, who went to the House of Correction. But names don't signify much so long as parties are friendly. And now that me and you are going to be father and son together, you'll see how you'll get on, and depend upon it it's a good bargain you've made this day, my lord—that is Frederick; for, not counting the money, my Mary's a good gal, though I say it who shouldn't."

"I am persuaded that your daughter has all the qualities that can brighten a home," said Mayrose with feeling: "and I pledge you my sincere endeavours to make her happy—should she accept me."

"There aint much fear of any gal saying no to a smart young man like you," bluntly ejaculated Sir Ham, whose agitation rather grew than decreased, so that he rumbled his hair, as if heated thoughts were cropping up there by the thousand. "No, there ain't, for it's fair play to own that you'll give as much as you'll take, your family 'aving been Peers two hundred years ago—I know it from reading it in the Peerage. Now, if my poor Mike had lived, I'd a taken care that he should 'ave been a Peer, for me and my wife, Jane, we kept a shop in Pudding Alley, which I don't care to conceal now we've riz so much since; and the lower you've been the higher you like to go—that's the truth, Mayrose. Well, it'll be a blessing to Jane and me to think that in spite of all, Mary's children will 'ave titles as good as any to be 'ad" (he was within an ace of saying "bought"); "bigger titles than you 'ave now, perhaps," proceeded the Knight, with sudden enthusiasm. "For when you get back all the Mayrose lands you ought to become a Earl or a Markiss and a Chief Secretary and wear the Garter. You'll see what you'll become with me working to my dying day to pick up more money for you—as I used to do for poor Mike when I began!"

The matter of all this was more pleasant than the manner of saying it, for the Knight's purse-pride oozed from all his pores, and was oppressive to Mayrose. But the young Peer detested falsehood, and could not bring himself to pretend hypocritically that monetary considerations were nothing to him in this match. All he could do was to hint that settlements had better be left to the lawyers; this, though, did not suit Sir Ham. The Prime Warden of the Sausage-makers had been at too much pains in amassing his wealth to let financial rhapsodies be curtly dismissed. His gold, laboriously accumulated, was to him as the works of art on which a partner builds his renown—and, after all, does not the painter display his pictures? and does not the poet read aloud the lyrics he has composed? and will not the advocate boast of his famous pleas, and the Doctor of his best cures? Sir Ham did no more than painter or poet when, during an hour, he heaped up figures before his future son-in-law as if they had been great mounds of specie, which he had personally dug out of the earth's bowels. And his gooseberry eyes sparkled as he did this, his wheezing voice became clear and strong, and when he dilated on the *solidity* of his wealth he was like an architect exhibiting a palace he has erected, and stamping about the floors with the cry, "See how firm and

imperishable? See how massive and beautiful!" For the first time Mayrose felt he was in the presence, and indeed in the grasp of a man who had given up his whole soul to the pursuit of the metal for which men get damned, and lying there in his *burnous* he marvelled how he could even have mistaken this lambent-eyed City huckster for a fellow of dull wits. It is certain that the society Pennywoddle, shambling and bewildered, and the Pennywoddle intent on business, were diverse incarnations. The latter had wits to spare, and knew all the worth of the fortune he had gotten, for gold is but power in portable form.

Mayrose was awakened from the stupor into which the Knight's phantasmagoric money-plea had plunged him by feeling a hand on his shoulder. His future father-in-law had started up and was leaning over him till their faces almost touched, and Mayrose slightly recoiled, dreading that he was going to be kissed. "You've made me twenty years younger in this 'ere hour," blurted out the Sausage-maker. "I thought I'd got all I wanted, but I feel now as if I were poor again, and had to win twice more than I've ever done afore for your sake and Mary's. And I will; you mark my words."

"You are too generous," murmured Mayrose, scarcely knowing what to say, but still laboring under the intoxication of the Knight's excited talk. Will you remember me to Lady Pennywoddle? and as soon as I can go out I will have the pleasure of calling."

"No, no; but you sha'n't wait till then," protested Sir Ham, whipping out a capacious gold watch; "my wife, Mary, and Grace is going to the bazaar again this afternoon, and I told 'em to call for me at my club, that I might inform 'em how you were. They'll be there in a few minutes, and I'll just drive down and bring them back here. You're ill, and it's right of them to visit you, and when my wife and I and Grace just take a turn round your house to look at the rooms, you can remain alone with Mary and speak to her. Nothing's ever gained by wastin' time."

Mayrose was taken aback by this suggestion; but Sir Ham exerted his first prerogative as a father-in-law by waving one of his violet gloves to hush, and waddled towards the door, assuring that good would come of it. He descended the stairs, and his brougham was heard flying away with him through the square.

Mayrose then got up to ring the bell, and some minutes were spent by Bino and Quilpin Leech in tidying the rooms, regrouping the flowers, and removing all the notes in feminine hand. Mayrose did not brush his hair, for, as above explained, he had but little left; had he possessed it all, however, his present mood was not such as that he would have cared to render himself seductive. Now that Sir Ham was away, and that the fumes of his gold-talk had dispersed, Mayrose felt the keen degradation of having sold himself, and if he could he would have backed out of this engagement into which he had rushed with such ignoble precipitancy. Propped up by pillows in his long chair, he sat and reflected with burning brow how wretchedly the money-talk had deflowered what little romance there had been in his courtship of Mary. He had decided to make of marriage a business, and it had been made a business with a vengeance; for when he had spoken of love, Sir Ham had answered by holding forth like a prospectus. It happened that there was hanging on the wall facing him the portrait of one of his seventeenth century ancestors, painted by Lely. The jaunty pencil of the Anglo-Dutch painter, who delighted in sensuous physiognomies, had given this bygone Mayrose the features of a rake; and it seems that he had not wronged his sitter. But the rake had left behind him such a reputation as a chivalrous, loyal, unselfish scapegrace. It was said of him that he had finished sowing his wild-oats by eloping with a school-girl to whom he had remained tolerably faithful ever after, though by so doing he had thrown away an heiress who wished to endow him with half a county. The *mesalliance* had not much damaged his fortunes, for he had made a fine figure in the world in spite of all, and if his portrait could have spoken, it would certainly have bragged that there was a time when the Springfields did not consider it necessary to sell themselves in order to illustrate their names. Mayrose felt the taunt, though it was unuttered, for it requires little illusion to make us think that our ancestors sit in judgment on our acts; and undeniably he was now breaking through the tradition of a line of soldier nobles who had never used their helmets

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or coronets as tills for the gains of city traders. However, it was too late to turn back now; if he had chosen the wrong road to fortune the penalty would be his own, and he should probably be obliged to bear it soon enough. The returning wheels of Sir Ham's carriage drew up at the door, whilst Mayrose was puzzling all this out in a shame-faced spirit, and in another minute the Knight and his family were ushered into the room.

It was evident that Sir Ham had let fall no hint of what had taken place or was preparing, for excellent Lady Pennywoddle sat down by Mayrose as if she were going to have a comfortable talk with him about his burns, and to recommend the healing properties of raw mashed potato. She was amazed when, after a few minutes, Sir Ham fussily begged permission to visit the house, and drew her out with Grace Marvell, leaving Mary behind. Let it be mentioned that Sir Ham's inspection of the house was not a mere formality. Under Mr. Quilpin Leech's wondering guidance every room was examined, as those at Springfield had been a few months before, and the Knight went through an identical course of furniture-prodding, mattress-pressing, and wainscot-tapping—but this time triumphantly, like a man who overhauls a purchase. Meanwhile Mary sat at a little distance from Mayrose and blushed.

She looked very pretty. What had passed between Mayrose and herself at the Bazaar accounted for her confusion; but her present anxiety and sympathy for his sufferings tinged her pure features with a gentle sisterly air of solicitude. Then her mourning dress served to give a yet sadder, more maidenly expression of quiet to her demeanour, so that Mayrose gradually felt his hopelessness revive as he gazed on her. He forgot the Knight's inflated speeches of scrip and share; he shut his eyes to the sardonic sneer of Lely's scapegrace; and saw only that Mary was a lovable girl—one whom he might well accept as a helpmate, even if she came to him dowerless. He turned and tried to assume a comfortable posture by resting on his elbow, but in so doing disturbed his pillows, and this gave Mary the opportunity of ministering to him as a nurse and helping to prop him. When her hands had smoothed his pillow he did not suffer them to go but retained them in his, and looking up into her face, said:—

"Mary, your father has left us alone that I might ask you a question. After what occurred yesterday may I hope that I am not wholly indifferent to you?—can you love me enough to be my wife?"

She hung her head and her bosom heaved in quick throbs. She had known that this question would come, but he had only begged for her love without mentioning his. If he would but say that he loved her! He on his side, watching her emotion, felt a manly repugnance to deceive the poor girl. If she accepted him it should be of her own free choice, and he would not woo her without telling her as much of the truth as he could without brutality. So he resumed, still holding her hands:—

"I will confess to you, Mary, what I have told to no one before, that I was in love with Lady Azalea Carol, and suffered more than I can express when I found my affection was not requited. But that is past now, and if you can love me no shadow of another attachment shall stand between us. My whole heart will be yours."

"She would have made you a better wife than I," faltered Mary, with her eyes downcast.

"No. She was not purer, better, or more lovely than yourself, but we had known each other longer, and that is what pleased my infatuation."

"It could not have been infatuation. How do you know that she did not love you?"

"She accepted some one else; and I feel now that she only liked me as a sister. Yes, Mary, that is quite past now."

"And yet if you were ever to learn that you had been mistaken—if you ever learned that she did and does love you?"

He was silent for a moment under the unexpected question, but then replied earnestly—

"Even then, Mary, her image would be banished from my very thoughts after

I had placed yours there. Will you believe my promise of this? The past I cannot undo, but the future is in your hands, and you can make it a very blissful one."

She was only too wishful to believe him. Whatever resolutions she had sought to make against letting her heart be surprised, all melted at the candid avowal of his first love, which he would put away for her sake. He could not, as he justly said, undo the past; but if the future were her own, and if with loving him with all patience, tenderness, and devotion she could secure his happiness, she felt that she should indeed be happy too.

So she raised her eyes with a tearful smile, and that was her answer of consent. "Kiss me," he said; and she stooped and kissed his forehead.

Such was Mayrose's short wooing—such the manner in which he enthralled Mary and obtained her hand and fortune. But much as his conscience smote him for his original aims in seeking this marriage, he meant to be faithful to his troth. Whilst the innocent lips of his affianced bride were touching his brow he inwardly vowed that by God's help he would in those beautiful words of our English service, honour and cherish her for better or worse, in sickness and health, till death parted them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH THE BOUDOIR CABAL IS FORMED.

Sir Ham Pennywoddle was not the man to keep the engagement secret. He hastened away to spread the news of it all hot in the city, and by-and-bye returned to bring it within the ken of Westminster. He received congratulations from brother magnates of the Sausage Makers' Company, from brother Oyster-shell Promoters, from brother M. P.'s, and even went the length of communicating the domestic tidings to the great Mr. Paramount, who wondered, but extemporized a gracious compliment. Mr. Dexter was also informed of the news, and ought, one would think, to have evinced disappointment, but, strangely enough, he was among the sincerest in his felicitations. Latterly he had grown rather reserved in his attentions towards Mary—the change having somehow dated from the time of Grace Marvell's adoption in Sir Ham's house—and his sentiments may be gathered from some remarks which he made to the Rev. Nonus Nines, when that ecclesiastic bantered him cheerfully on his "sell;" "I am not sold, but possibly Mayrose will be. He thinks he has made a fine bargain, and I hope he has, but if some one starts up and whips two-thirds of Sir Ham's fortune out of his reach, don't you be surprised, but remember I prophesied it."

Mayrose meantime did not attempt secrecy either. Having taken the irrevocable step he made it a point of honour with himself not to appear ashamed of his new family, but to affirm his betrothal courageously. He seemed to salve his conscience by doing this. All the visitors who followed Sir Ham in the afternoon were apprised that the Under-Secretary for Australia was going to be married, and by these means the intelligence had circulated before midnight through all the highways and byways of society.

Lord Hornette, who saw Mayrose at four, bore the news to Rosemary House at five. It was his usual hour for going to pay his court to Zellie, and it chanced that to-day Lady Beaujolais, Lady Coralmer, and numerous other ladies, were assembled at a "drum," each with a teacup in her hand. The talk had been all about Mayrose's exploit at the bazaar, and his presence of mind and daring had been so enthusiastically extolled that Zellie, who stood at the tea-urn, had more than once changed colour, and had at last begged Violet to take her place, pretexting that the sun was in her eyes. Lord Hornette's communication produced as much dismay as if that urn, which was enormous, had exploded.

"Yes; Mayrose is going to be married," repeated Lord Hornette, sitting down beside Zellie, and rather enjoying the sensation he had caused. "It's a capital match; he couldn't have done better."

"Well, I am surprised!" exclaimed Lady Beaujolais, who had been too much put-out at first to speak. "The man who of all others I should have thought above

a mercenary marriage!" And she glanced sympathetically at Lady Coralmere, who had turned pale, but was too much of a *grande dame* not to recover almost instantaneously.

"Is Miss Pennywoddle so very rich?" asked Lady Coralmere, coldly.

"Oh, yes! one of the richest girls in the city, I believe, my dear," replied Lady Albert Drone, yclept Belladonna, the wife of Mayrose's chief; and with her usual propensity to make her hearers open their eyes, she added: "Those city marriages were always great things, but they sometimes turn out badly. There was Mr. Fitzwittol, who married Miss Bullion, of Lombard street, and became Lord Pottifer, but two years after the wedding he discovered that one of his grooms, who always rode out with Lady Pottifer, had been her lover before marriage. He tried to horsewhip the man, but was not strong enough, and got flung on to a heap outside the stable. It's a painful story, and I—"

"Never allude to it," laughed Lord Hornette, who knew his respected aunt's foibles.

"Oh, but I do not think it is at all a matter to laugh at!" remonstrated Lady Beaujolais, in real commotion. "When a nobleman makes little of all his dignity to marry a vulgar upstart girl, one should grieve over it."

"It shows so little principle," echoed a rather ripe Lady Diana Keane-Forester, who had been keenly chasing fortunes unsuccessfully for a term of years."

"And such a want of spirit," chimed in an equally ripe Lady Mussica Rodent, who had been nibbling with singular unsucccess round the heart of an ennobled pawnbroker for two seasons past.

"Now, I really cannot see all that," said Lord Hornette, in his highest and driest voice. "If I had been in Mayrose's place I should have done exactly the same thing, and considered it an affair of duty. Sir Ham Pennywoddle has got all the Mayrose lands, and by marrying this young lady Mayrose puts himself at the top of the count, again."

Lord Hornette was not a backbiting enemy. He had waged war with Mayrose, and had prevailed over him, but the victory once decided, he was too great a personage to bear any grudge or to condescend to tattle. On the whole he rather liked Mayrose since he had worsted him; and though he would have been prepared to take up the cudgels against him again if Mayrose had come athwart his interests, pleasures, or even his momentary comfort, he could afford to stand by him now that they were at peace, and especially now that his back was turned. So, disregarding the chorus of protests which hailed his "shocking excuses for what was quite inexcusable," he said to Lady Belladonna:—

"I hope you will leave a card on the Pennywoddles, Aunt; it will be the thing to do, as Mayrose is in your office."

"Oh, certainly, Hornette," screamed the honest lady, "If she's rich we shall have to acknowledge her some day or other, and the sooner it's done with good grace the better. There was the late Lady Downdale now, who had been a ballet-dancer, and whom everybody wanted to send to Coventry. Lady Canonlaugh was particularly eager about it, but I said to her, 'My dear Susan, if you make yourself an enemy of that woman depend upon it she will pay you out,' and, surely enough, one night, when Canonlaugh said he was going to a meeting at Exeter Hall, his wife discovered that he had taken Lady Downdale to dine at the Star and Garter. She found it out because she had gone there herself with the Italian Prince Casino, and she and her husband met in one of the passages. It's a painful story, and I should be sorry if anyone repeated it."

"I will go by all means and call on Lady Pennywoddle," said Lady Rosemary, quietly, to her intended son-in-law, when Lady Belladonna had done speaking; "and, my dear Alice" (this to Lady Beaujolais), "I think you quite misjudge Lord Mayrose; if he has proposed to Miss Pennywoddle it must be because he really likes her."

"Oh, he was always a favourite of yours, Lady Rosemary."

"And he is so still, my dear child. I helped to bring him up as if he were a son of my own, and can answer that he is the soul of honour."

"Appearances are much against him, then," retorted indignant Lady Beaujo-

lais, who felt a quite unquenchable animosity against Mayrose for having upset the fine schemes she had built up for him. And then his deceit in lunching with her two days before, and saying nothing about Miss Pennywoddle! "I can have no patience with young men who marry or look as if they marry for money," added her pretty ladyship, rather oblivious of the worldly counsels she had herself bestowed.

"Well, I feel almost bound to make a confession," said Lady Rosemary, in that sterling tone of truthfulness which was never so conspicuous as when she was defending somebody against a social league. "When Lord Mayrose returned to England last winter I was the first to hint at his possible marriage with Miss Pennywoddle and I am in some way responsible for the marriage. I know the idea had not occurred to him before I mentioned it—he was even surprised, and by no means attracted by it. But you may be sure, my dear Alice, that I should not have suggested to one whom I loved as my own son a marriage in which I could see the least impropriety."

Poor Lady Rosemary! She had urged this defence impelled by the genuine nobility of her nature; but if she could have seen the expression that mounted to Zellie's eyes, and the pallor that stole over her face, her heart would have smitten her for the generous imprudence she had committed. Lord Hornette saw it all, and, leaning towards Lady Rosemary, said, in a whisper—

"Do you not think, dear Lady Rosemary, that when you call on Lady Pennywoddle Zellie should go with you? It will allay the last breath of former rumours."

Lady Rosemary returned an evasive answer, and the company soon broke up to go and cackle elsewhere about the outrageous match. Every man of the world who marries behaves outrageously according to one or more ladies interested in his welfare; but it is not every man who stirs up so many enemies as Mayrose. Lady Beaujolais swore that she could not forgive his "duplicity;" Lady Coralmere felt that her prospective widowhood had been slighted; and these two were a host in themselves. Then there was the lady whose chignon Mayrose had knocked off at the bazaar whilst saving her life, and who turned out to be the Honourable Mrs. Bussle, wife of Coney Bussle, M. P., and an active character in society. Mrs. Bussle was naturally bilious at having been exhibited in her baldness to the public, and treasured up this woe for exemplary revenge; and then there were the Ladies Midge, Rodent, and Keane-Forester, whom Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere hated, but with whose official grudges they were now prepared to sympathize, because it is sweet to pay off scores against an old friend.

An evening or two later it chanced that most of Lady Rosemary's visitors met again at a small "At-home" of Lady Canonlaugh's—the identical Lady Canonlaugh who had gone to Richmond with Prince Casino; but since that day she and her husband had devoted themselves to good works. In her ladyship's boudoir Lady Beaujolais said:—

"But why should we ladies not set our faces against mercenary marriages? I think that when a man marries as Lord Mayrose does we ought to make a vow never to call on him or on his wife, never to invite them to our parties, never to consent to belong to any club or charity with which they are connected."

"I so entirely agree with you, my dear," replied virtuous Lady Canonlaugh—age thirty-five, hair dark, eyes holy, religion evangelical.

"And so do I!" chorused several other ladies, with the spirit of sanctity flaming brightly within them.

"You see, if we did that we should defeat the object of these wicked marriages," proceeded Lady Beaujolais, bravely. "It is high time we proclaimed that a gentleman who marries a woman for her money does a dishonourable thing, and that the woman who accepts such a man is a spiritless creature."

Everybody concurred that it was high time, and then there it was voted that Lord Mayrose and his wife should be made to shiver under that blast of propriety which, according to Macaulay, blows over London once every seven years—in other words, that they should be in a manner tabooed and flouted. None of the ladies Drone took part in these resolutions, because the chief of their clan, Lord

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Hornette, forbade them; but the matter coming somehow to the ears of Mr. Paramount, he observed with a laugh:—

"Dear me, the thing is serious; it's a regular Boudoir Cabal."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BETROTHAL GIFTS.

All unconscious of the stir which her engagement was occasioning, Mary passed the first days after her betrothal in a dream full of charm. That period, which is in every girl's life the most important, lost none of its sweet hopefulness for her because it had arrived so suddenly. The pure visions of happiness to come, those rosy hallucinations conjured up by the ecstasy of love, came upon her with a surprising freshness, undimmed by any of the disenchantments which result from a passion crossed, or from an engagement too long deferred. It is true the growth of her love had been checked for a while by unkind rumours, but those rumours were like the cold winds which do but delay the blossoms, not like the frost which nips them in the bud, and it had needed but the face and voice of her lover to make the budding passion start into full growth as the seed breaks into flower in the first rays of sun-warmth. Happy these who bring to their marriage, as Mary was going to do, the offering of a virgin love, with all its gent'e trustfulness and fair illusions! Happy those who look upon this holiest of ties, not as a formal linking of interests, but as a new and blessed birth to a gladder life!

Ignoring the fiat of the Boudoir Cabal against herself and her affianced, Mary abandoned herself to the delight of all the pretty incidents which attend an engagement. Every morning there came a magnificent bouquet with a note from her lover, and every afternoon she went with her father and mother to Berkeley Square to see how the patient was progressing. He grew well rapidly, and did not fail, with kind gallantry, to attribute this rapid cure to his happiness; and she believed him—what girl would not have done so? When not with him she thought of him; and it was a curious thing, though natural, how in the prospect of her marriage Mary's whole character underwent a change; how she tried to attune all her ideas to those of the man whose destiny she was to share, and whom she felt to be so much her superior in rank, education, and worldly knowledge. Hitherto she had not cared for being rich, and we know that if she could have had her own way the life of a shop-girl was that which she would have preferred; but now, for her lover's sake, she rejoiced in her father's wealth, and saw how in generous hands it might be made to serve noble purposes. Such was the revulsion in her sentiments on this subject that her heart was full of contrition and self-reproach when she thought that she had imputed it as a crime to her future husband that he had appeared to seek after money. Had he not a great position to keep up, and was he not right—nay, in duty bound—to seek wealth for the good which he was in a position to do with it? and then ought she not to bless the wealth that had raised her to the sphere where she had been enabled to meet this man, whom she so tenderly loved, and without whom it now seemed to her that no happiness in life could exist?

Then, again, as to birth. No royal princess with a thousand years of lineage could have been more disdainful of titles than Mary; but since she was to be the wife of a nobleman she rivalled any Republican in her stealthy interest for studying the peerage. Sir Ham Pennywoddle possessed peerages of all sizes, and Mary had often looked out the name of Mayrose in the smaller ones; but now she removed the biggest—the one which devoted a page and a half to the Springfields—to her room, and in every half hour she could snatch would pore with a wistful eye over the long roll of worthies who had graced the name which she was to bear. Never had that gallant and untruthful volume been conned over with such intense conviction, for Mary piously accepted all its legends as gospel—believed in the Sprygfelt who had flourished under Ethelwolf, in the Sprynfeldt who had added an "n" to his name and marched against the Danes, and in all the descendants of the two above, more or less apocryphal until the time of the undoubted Sir Lyon Springfeld, who had been created Baron by Charles I. Not only did Mary pore over

these names, but she tried to commit them to memory ; and was learning to be so proud of them that on the day Mayrose was well enough to go out and pay his first visit to Pennywoddle House he was surprised to hear his future wife recite to him all his family genealogy. The thing came about by an accident. He was introduced into the drawing-room where Mary was alone, and in coming forward to greet him she let fall a paper from her pocket. He picked it up, and restoring it to her with a kiss, said playfully :

"A love-letter, Mary?"

"I didn't want you to see it—but you can now," she smiled, turning pink, and showed him the paper on which she had copied out her new family in chronological order as school-girls do a difficult page of history.

"Why, Mary, you will know more about my people than I do ; but you must not believe in the Sprygfeldt who paid tribute to Ethelwolf."

"I believed in them all!"

"I wish I could. There was a man who wanted to derive our name from a sprig which we carried in our felt hats like the Plantagenets—unfortunately, as an Irishman would say, felt hats were made of cloth in those times."

"But Sir Lyon Springfield, who was wounded at Edgehill, is true?"

"Yes, he's true ; and if he came back he would disown me for a Roundhead," laughed Mayrose, looking at his closely-cropped head and bristly moustache in the glass. This brought a look of solicitude to Mary's face and a tender question about Mayrose's health.

"Do you really feel quite well now?"

"Quite well, darling. And see here," he added, gently taking her hand, and drawing a little case from his pocket—"here is my betrothal-ring, and I want you to fix our wedding-day. We need not wait till the end of the session, for nothing very important will be done in Parliament till next year, and I can get leave"—saying which he glided a brilliant turquoise and diamond hoop on to her finger, and raised her tiny hand to his lips.

His other arm was wound round her waist ; and looking up to his face with a tear in each of her eyes, she nestled her head to his shoulder. "What a beautiful ring!" she murmured, but made no answer to the other part of his question.

"Let us be married in July," he continued, and go for a three months' tour abroad. I should like everybody to know that our wedding-day is settled ; and that reminds me that Lady Rosemary is going to call here, probably to-day. I wrote to tell her of our engagement, and received this kind letter in reply—read it, dear!"

"Isn't she a very proud lady?" whispered Mary, as she took the letter and ran her eyes rather timidly over its contents.

"She is the kindest and best of women, who has been to me like a mother."

"I am so afraid she may not like me ; but all your friends have been very good to us. Lady Albert Drone called yesterday, and the Duchess of Bumblebeigh left a card."

"Lady Albert is a good-natured person. I scarcely know the Duchess."

"And Lady Albert spoke so warmly of you! It almost made mamma cry with pleasure. The Duchess did not come upstairs."

Mary went on to prattle artlessly about the big people who had honoured her ; and all her gratitude towards the Drones was deserved. The Earl of Hornette, who ruled with a despotic hand over his kinsfolk of all degrees, had so taken Mayrose's marriage under his patronage, that he had prevailed even on his mother to go in her yellow chariot and leave cards. As to Lord Balbie, Lady Belladonna, and all the other Drones, they submissively carried out the Earl's views by personally seeing Lady Pennywoddle, and showing themselves most gracious and complimentary. Lord Hornette found a greater task in persuading Lady Rosemary that it was expedient Zellie should accompany her on her visit, but here also he ended by carrying his point with customary adroitness. On the day which the Countess had appointed for her call he contrived to be at Rosemary House, and suggested in Zellie's presence—as if it were a happy thought just occurred to him—that he and Zellie should just go too, "out of civility to my old school-fellow," and that is why, an hour or

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so after she had received her betrothal-ring, Mary was put through the ordeal of seeing her future husband's first love.

Mayrose had not expected to see Zellie, and stood up with the blood rushing all about his body; whilst Lady Pennywoddle, who was then in the room, bustled forward, purple with satisfaction and humility, to receive her distinguished visitors. The Countess shook hands with her, and then turning to Mary, drew her tenderly into her arms and kissed her.

"My dear child, I have looked upon Mayrose as a son of my own, and shall consider you as my daughter."

How Mayrose got through the next few minutes, during which he heard Zellie congratulate him, he could not have said, but everybody was seated, and Lady Rosemary was holding Mary's hand in hers, when Lord Hornette apostrophised him cheerily.

"You remember my asking you to be my best man, Mayrose; but if you are going to be married before me I must be yours? And, Lady Pennywoddle, I should like one of my sisters to be Miss Pennywoddle's bridesmaid."

"It will be a great honour to us all, my lord," whimpered poor Lady Pennywoddle, who was near the melting mood after all this condescension.

"You must write and tell me when the wedding is to be," said the Countess to Mary, whom she had succeeded after her wont in endearing to her in one moment; and some of the desultory remarks usual to these bridal visits followed, until Lady Pennywoddle begged Mary to show Zellie some of the presents she had already received from divers of Sir Ham's friends in the city. These presents, rich in kind and value, were in another room, and both the girls retired together. Then it was that Mary's heart beat so fast as almost to check her breath. With the intuition natural to all women, she had seen that things were as she had feared, and that Zellie loved Mayrose as much as she had been loved by him. Yes, there was no mistaking the look of her downcast eyes when he and she had shaken hands, nor the constrained silence they had maintained when sitting near each other. And what a pang it cost her to make this discovery! Mayrose was her own now—he had vowed to love her whatever should hap, and it was only on this solemn vow that she accepted him; but who was she to compare with this lovely girl who had all the graces and charms of high birth and patrician training that were wanting in herself? She felt a moment as if all the tradesman blood in her veins were asserting itself in her face and voice to make her look vulgar and ludicrous, and she felt too that she hated Zellie for coming to humiliate her in her lover's eyes. But her hatred could not survive the appealing touch that was laid on her arm when she and Zellie were alone.

"Mamma said you should be her daughter," said Zellie, gazing into her eyes. "Will you let me call you Mary, and be your sister? Lord Mayrose is almost my brother."

"And he loves you so deeply," sobbed rather than answered Mary, carried away into this avowal by the hope that she might learn the worst at once.

"I love him too—as a sister," answered Zellie, tranquilly. She would not have avowed this a fortnight before; but her mother's confessions as to the part she had taken in this marriage, had cleared her generous mind of all resentment against Mayrose. "I have always loved him as a sister," she repeated softly. "But now I want you to accept this from me." She had drawn a necklace and medallion from her pocket, and clasped them round Mary's throat. "It contains a lock of hair," she said; "it was Lord Mayrose's hair when he was a child."

They remained almost half an hour together, and Mary came back with red eyes. Whilst Lady Rosemary's visit lasted she sat with her glance averted from her lover and with her face blanched. But as soon as the Countess was gone she took the pretext of leading Mayrose to see her presents, and once the door had closed behind them, threw herself with a terrible bitterness of sorrow into his arms.

"I have not the heart to conceal it from you. If I did it would bring me misfortune. She loves you as much as you could ever love her."

"Who?" asked Mayrose, very pale.

"Lady Azelea Carol. And oh, I know, I know, I am not so lovely nor so good

as she is; and if you still love her don't consider me, but go to her before it is too late!"

Mayrose had time to take in all the aspects of this revelation. Whether Zellie loved him or not, it was too late to win her now, for she would not withdraw her troth from Lord Hornette. Then Mary might be mistaken, and speaking under the mere delusion of a first jealousy. At any rate he had promised to be true to Mary whatever befell, and he was resolved to keep his word. Not only that, but the happiness of his life to come, as well as every motive of manliness, chivalry, and common kindness required that he should pretend to be sincerely in love with his intended wife; so he stroked her hair soothingly as she lay sobbing on his breast; and whispered—

"I told you, Mary, I had broken for ever with the past. I love, and will love, nobody on earth but you."

"But if you should ever regret this?"

"I never will, if you love me. Do you love me, darling?"

"Oh, so much—so much! But I would rather die than see you repine. I want only to see you happy."

"Then let this be a closed book between us," he said, sealing her trembling lips with a kiss; "and as soon as you please, let us become man and wife."

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BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

INTERLUDE.

Mayrose and Mary were married, with what pomp anybody can see by referring to the newspapers of the time. Mr. Paramount and half the Cabinet stood near the altar at St. George's. The owners of the biggest money-bags in the city mixed in the vestry with the noblest venders of corn-sheaves, and signed the register; the Worshipful Company of Sausage-makers presented the bride with a pearl necklace of three rows, and the directors of the Oyster-shell Company clubbed with the Aldermen and Common Councillors to give her a silver-gilt dessert service such as had never been seen. Of other presents there was enough to stock an enterprising jewellery shop; and the gifts of the Drone family, as also their demonstrative kindness to the young couple, were particularly admired. Lady Mella Drone, one of Lord Hornette's sister's, was among the guests, so was one of Lord Albert Drone's daughters; and Lord Hornette himself both acted as best man and returned thanks for the unmarried ladies in an amusing speech at the breakfast. During this breakfast it was whispered among the guests that the bride's dower was 500,000 pounds in hard cash.

All this the Boudoir Cabal bore as they could, but there can be no doubt that the attitude of the great House of Bumblebeigh checkmated them. The Drones have always wielded a legitimate influence in London Society, and no drawing-room plot is complete without their co-operation, or can hope to succeed in face of their resistance. It is the Drones who decide, as it were *ex cathedra*, what things are bad form and what not; whether a man shall be expelled from his club, whether a novel is improper, whether such and such a lady is a "creature;" and, to do them justice, they generally decide that things are bad form, that a man should be expelled from his club, that the novels in dispute are improper, and that such and such a lady is unquestionably a creature. But if they resolve otherwise, what league in Mayfair or Belgravia is potent enough to gainsay them? When the Midges, the Rodents, and the Keane-Foresters; when indignant Lady Beaujolais and chagrined Lady Coralmere, and the lady who had lost her chignon at the bazaar, and Lady Canonlaugh, and all the others, saw the Drones circling round Mayrose in a compact swarm, they perceived that their own band, however virtuously disposed to do harm, could effect little, at least for the present. Accordingly they kept the peace, not like people who throw their daggers away, but like hopeful persons who sheathe them and bide their time.

They bided their time so well that we must pass over the few weeks preceding Mayrose's marriage, and the seven or eight months that followed it, as wholly uneventful. The wedding was solemnized in early August, and Mayrose took his bride for a three months' tour to Paris, Switzerland and the Rhine. When they returned they spent half the winter at Springfield and the other half at Penny. Mayrose ran up to town almost every day by train to attend to his Government duties; but as Parliament was not sitting, and as all the drawing-rooms in town were swathed in brown-holland, no difficulties political or social beset him. As for Mr. Keane-Midge, that gentleman having also taken a three months' holiday after Mayrose's return (the first such holiday since twenty years, so it was reported), the two had no opportunity for clashing.

But during this dead season the world continued to wag as usual, and events important to others occurred in the usual course. Of these some concern us, and firstly this: that Zellie did not marry Lord Hornette. Soon after Mayrose's wedding she fell ill—of the fatigues of the season, said the doctors—and getting worse instead of better as the autumn wore on, was ordered to winter at Nice, so that her marriage was postponed. On the other hand, about New Year's tide, Violet Carol became Marchioness of Chevychase. The rich young peer of that name, coasting

in his yacht along the shores of the Mediterranean, whither Violet had accompanied Zellie with Lord and Lady Rosemary, came, saw, and was conquered by her all in less than three months, and the marriage was celebrated under the blue sky and in the winter warmth of the olive country. Chevychase had been one of Mayrose's school friends, but the friendship cooled on the Marquis's side from the day of his marriage, and there is reason to believe that Violet caused her wedding to take place in France instead of waiting till she was home, solely that Mayrose and his wife might not be among the guests. She was a staunch little hater was Violet. When Lord Hornette had asked her to be one of Mary's bridesmaids she had refused with scorn, and her sister's illuess developed her animosity against our friend to that agreeable feminine pitch which knows no bounds, and will be allayed by no reasoning. Furthermore, being now a Marchioness, she was going to have excellent opportunities of evincing her resentment and taking a leading part in the Boudoir Cabal.

So we now resume our narrative at a ten months' distance from the last book, when another session has begun and when London is once more full or filling. People are more excited when they were a year ago, for Mr. Paramount's administration having been in office a whole twelvemonth has received the customary hints that its popularity is waning. It has lost one or two borough seats hitherto considered faithful; it has quarreled with the Tobacco Interest, forfeited the confidence of the Soap-tax Repealers, been denounced in Exeter Hall by ladies and gentlemen interested in the promotion of infectious ladies, and in Hyde Park by the numerous Associations flourishing among us for the glorification of Treason, Cant, and Insalubrity. Moreover, having ejected from Westminster Abbey a number of Shakers who had wished to try their right of dancing in the nave between the services, it has incurred the odium of all lovers of religious equality; and, worse than that, it has aroused the indignation of earnest Mr. Paradyse's party by introducing nothing into the Queen's Speech on the matter of Home Rule for Scotland, Wales, and the Isle of Wight. The reason of this is simply that Mr. Paramount has not yet been able to educate his followers to the notion of bringing Britain back to the practice of the Heptarchy; but Mr. Paradyse—who is the educatee, not the educator of his own disciples—intends to bring forward a motion (backed by agitation out of doors) to pledge the House of Commons to the programme of the Home Rulers; and the question as to how Mr. Paramount will parry this lunge is the prime topic of the hour.

Now, in a piously, industrious land it is natural that the man who has made a large fortune in no time should grow in public esteem every year: therefore, Sir Ham Pennywoddle thus continues to grow; and Mr. Quintus Dexter, who makes a handsome income by reporting the crimes and misdemeanors of an immaculate people, is much revered, too, and has risen in the course of one twelve-month to be a power in the State.

CHAPTER II.

PRINCE RUBINO CASINO DEI CASINI.

One day about noon Mr. Dexter was seated breakfasting in his rooms at the Albany, when a very editorial valet he had acquired brought him a visiting card. Mr. Dexter's rooms were those which Lord Hornette once tenanted, but had surrendered when he thought himself on the point of marriage; and Mr. Dexter had taken them because the Albany is popularly supposed to be quiet. One might say a good deal about quiet rooms and streets, and point out that the quietest thoroughfares are those like Fleet-street, where the continuous roll of traffic drowns all other sounds. In the Albany a man is disturbed twenty times in an hour by the newsboys, tradesmen, servants, and others clattering down the flagged passage, and raising loud echoes which are not of peace. But owing to the fondness of Englishmen for claustral life, this dull, dark block of houses, into which the sun never penetrates, ranks highest among bachelor residences. So probably Mr. Dexter felt quiet there.

The card which the editorial valet now bore to him was engraved in the foreign

fashion with a coronet and gilt name: *Prince Rubino Casino dei Casini*. Mr. Dexter bade that Prince Casino might be shown in, and there tripped in a smiling gentleman, well-known and liked in London Society. He had a crop of black hair, curly as a poodle's, and oiled; round cheeks, blue where the razors had touched them, pink where they had not; a raven moustache waxed at the two ends like gimlets; brown swimming eyes and laughing teeth. He was faultlessly dressed; had boots like mirrors, and a carnation in his button-hole; and his English, though peppered with French and Italian exclamations, was very good and intrepid.

"*Mon cher Dexter*, I thought to find you in bed or out of doors," he began, smiling upon the editor with his whole face as he shook hands. "You are at home, *tant mieux*; influential people are not always so accessible."

"I should think everybody was at home to you, Prince."

"Women, alas, yes! especially near forty years old. I call upon such ones hoping they have gone out into the Park, but the servant says: 'Step in, sir.' On the other hand, the man from whom one wants a favour, *mon Dieu*! how often he has gone for a walk."

"Well, sit down," said Mr. Dexter, who albeit the early hour had not been surprised in his dressing-gown, but was fully equipped for giving audiences. "Can I offer you some breakfast?"

"Yes, I will take a cup of your excellent tea. You English talk business better with your mouths full than otherwise, and my visit is for business. I hear you have much power over Sir Ham Pennywoddle, and I want you to introduce me."

The servant set a plate and cup, drew up the blind a few inches to let in more light, and poked a fire which needed no poking; the Prince, drawing off his gloves, sat down to the table and stirred his tea in the most convivial way possible. But when the servant was gone, Mr. Dexter said: "Sir Ham and I are friends, and I will introduce you with pleasure, but you are mistaken as to my having power over him."

"*Mon cher Dexter*, if I did not think you had power I would not be here. It is not an ordinary introduction, or I would have said to some man in a drawing-room, 'Present me to that ridiculous Pennywoddle,' and it would have been done. What I want is to borrow of Monsieur Pennywoddle five millions sterling."

"Five millions?" and Mr. Dexter held his cup in mid-air.

"Yes, I would like better ten millions, but one must be reasonable—and it is not for myself. Listen, *mon brave Dexter*, we have known each other some weeks, and are true friends, but I will explain: You have heard of the Republic of Rio-Brigande?"

"Rio-Brigande de las Bancorottas?"

"The same. Three times has it repudiated its national debt, and forty-six times changed its President in fifty-one years. It is time that should stop."

"The sooner the better."

"So my friend Descamisado says. 'Is it not time,' exclaims he, 'that a land which can cultivate the sugar-cane, coffee, tobacco, cotton, and I do not know what more, should rest from shooting its most illustrious citizens, and driving the rest into exile?' and I agree with him. Why, the country is in revolution now. According to the last telegrams the Insurrectionary Junta had voted that it would go to war with all the world preferably to paying its debts, and the Cabinet Ministers have been put to flight."

"I should think they were used to that."

"It is so, but I have faith that a new era will soon commence for them under the rule of my friend Descamisado. All he wants is some of your English sterling. He and I were at school together in Paris, and I know his worth, for though poor he is energetic, and has made of the science of politics a study. It is in Descamisado's name that I want to go to Sir Pennywoddle, and say: 'Lend five of your millions for the regeneration of Rio-Brigande. The loan will bear ten per cent. interest, and be guaranteed by customs receipts and tobacco monopoly.'"

"Ay, but who will guarantee the tobacco monopoly? Is Senor Descamisado President of the Republic?"

"*Ecco mi!* no, but he will shortly be. When he heard of this revolution he cried, '*Caramba!*' and sailed. That was three weeks ago. His last words to me at the Cafe Tortoni, in Paris, were: 'When next you hear of me I shall have made myself master of my miserable country and of the Junta, spilled the blood of the ringleaders, restored order, and closed the era of revolutions in Rio-Brigande.' That is what he said, finishing his absinthe, and it is a noble purpose."

"Supposing the Junta spill his own blood, though?"

"Descamisado can take care of his skin. He will worm himself into the confidence of everybody, then jump on them with his boots, for he has read Machiavelli. Ah, Dio! Descamisado will rank in history beside Cromwell and Rienzi. He has no belief in Parliaments. The Cortes of Rio-Brigande have been talking for the last fifty years. He will say to them, '*Cani maladetti, brutte bestie!*' so off, and do something useful!" and he will kick them out to rule by himself alone."

Thus spoke Prince Casino, who was a brilliant discourser, and whilst trifling with his tea he sketched such a well-coloured picture of Rio-Brigande reviving to peace, happiness, and solvency under the fostering hand of his friend Descamisado, that Mr. Dexter listened at first with amusement and then with a spice of interest. Prince Casino was not an adventurer. He had a grape-vine somewhere in Greece or Italy, and could have lived on it if put to the pinch. But he made no secret of the fact that he was to have a commission on the loan of five millions; indeed, he would have considered it an insult to the good sense of his hearer if he had pretended that he was launching himself into the concerns of Rio-Brigande, or of any other Republic or kingdom, for nothing. Prince Casino's infantine candour was one of the points that made him—as it does many other Italians—so adept in negotiation, and much more than a match for cautious Britons, who think that everybody is going to overreach them. He was so far from wishing to overreach anybody, that if there had been any roguery mixed up in this affair he would have entered into it all minutely. He swallowed two cups of tea and a tumbler of sugared water, and talked an hour, till Mr. Dexter was rather dazzled. The Prince's unexceptionable position in society of course lent some weight to his utterances, for Mr. Dexter worshipped an authentic title, as does every other respectable Briton.

"Well, Prince," said he, handing his visitor a box of pink Russian cigarettes, "I do not see why all you expect should not come to pass. The country will have to be regenerated some day, so Senor Descamisado may as well do it as anybody else. But why don't you apply to regular bankers?"

"Ah, San Gennaro! I have applied to a dozen, and they bow me to the door. One says, 'I have my cupboard full of Rio-Brigande scrip, which is good to light the fire with.' Another gets red in the face and says, 'I'll see 'em d—d first!' This is what they say, because they have no faith in Descamisado."

"I doubt whether Sir Ham will have faith either."

"No, but you will have faith in my assurance, and you will persuade that fat man. To tell you the truth, *amico mio*, I have heard Sir Pennywaddle is a little simple, and simple men are like oranges, to be squeezed by the thirsty. I would not propose to you a thing which I did not think solid; but Descamisado is a man to trust, for he will snap his forefinger and thumb at difficulties, whatever they be."

"And he has a party?"

"Certes, a strong party!" exclaimed the Prince, blowing blue rings from his pink cigarette. "There is no rosewater in his veins; and what blood he thinks useful to spill he *will* spill, my good Dexter. There will be men hanged, others shot; some will find their houses accidentally burned; and when they look for their property—*presto*—it will be in Descamisado's coffers. All this will be terrible, and the streets will for a time be full of shrieks; but Rio-Brigande will be like a strong girl rising up beautiful from a bed of disease; and she will pay her debts, which will comfort the bankers of you English in the City."

It was a singular thing enough this discussion about the expediency of promoting bloodshed from a speculative point of view. "Will it be a good investment to furnish one Descamisado with the means of slaughtering a few hundreds of sallow Republicans a few thousand miles off?" That was the question in its tersest form which was being discussed by an agitated Italian and a cool London editor. Mr.

Dexter had not to lend the money—he had only to speak; and he was too much of a believer in adventurers not to cherish a sort of fellow-feeling towards the enterprising Rio-Brigandian, the more so as it was tolerably indifferent to him how Sir Ham disposed of his money. He had paid off half the sum lent him to found the Reporter, and before long he hoped to liquidate the rest. Now that Mary was married, he had no further concern in Sir Ham's fortune than that which the purchase of shares in the Oyster-Shell Company gave him, and if Sir Ham took to dabbling in foreign loans, he, Mr. Dexter, might be able to clear something thereby, and liberate himself the faster. So he replied, after a little reflection—

"You would want to be introduced to Sir Ham without delay, and we will go to his house this very evening if you like. But I tell you fairly my influence over him is slight, and he is not the simple man you take him for. If you want to succeed you must secure the good graces of one whose little finger would be more potent than all my reasoning."

"Who is that valuable person, *mon bon* Dexter? I need not tell you," (and here removing the cigarette from his lips, he smiled a sweet smile, such as the most polished Fra Diavolo might have worn in dealing trumps out of a tricked pack of cards,) "I need not tell you that I understand English principles of business. You help me, and you become my partner in my little profits of the commission, and so will your other advocate; but I hope there will not be many partners. I always say to myself, 'Let me put as few cats as possible near the cream-jug'."

"This cat will not stand near the cream-jug," said Mr. Dexter, politely, but ignoring the first part of the remark, for though he was not the man to despise a bonus, he was Englishman enough to feign being above such a transaction.

"Ah! is it his son-in-law, that Milord Mayrose?" interrupted the Italian, eagerly, but with an air of great dismay, "if it is, I fear me that my friend Descamisado and I must go elsewhere. For I am a judge of faces, and that Milord Mayrose will let Rio-Brigande go to the bottom of the Atlantic before he would stir a finger for it."

"So I think," laughed Mr. Dexter, queerly; "but the person I mean has more influence over Sir Ham than Lord Mayrose or than the latter's wife. Have you ever met in society a young lady who is generally to be seen with Lady Pennywoddle or Lady Mayrose—a Miss Marvell?"

"Have I seen Miss Marvell? Why, I have dreamed about her—sighed about her! Ah, *mon bon* Dexter, I saw that angel in an opera-box one night, and when I had discovered her name, I looked about for some one to present me; but before I could meet her again, Descamisado wrote for me to join him in Paris; and since my return I have hunted those English bankers, and have not had a chance of again beholding that pearl."

"Well, Prince, the person who has most influence over Sir Ham is Miss Marvell. She has been living more than a year in his house, and could make him pour all his money into her lap if she were so minded."

"Whew!" whistled the perspicuous Italian, making two circumflex accents of his eyebrows. "And Miss Marvell is Sir Ham's—niece, cousin—his——?"

"No, she is nothing for the present but a companion to Lady Pennywoddle, and I am probably the only man who is aware that she may be anything more in the future. Lord Mayrose does not guess it, and she will keep it concealed from him as long as she can. But I must warn you of this, that if you wish to obtain her assistance for this loan you must point out that Sir Ham might get something more than money through it. Are there any orders of knighthood in Rio-Brigande?"

"Any number—yes, three—no, six, or fifteen—I forget; but Sir Ham shall have an Italian Barony, a Portuguese Grand Cross, two Spanish ribbons, and all the Republics of the South shall shower their crosses on him. Ah! I understand, that girl says to herself, Lady Pennywoddle is old and fat; if he dies I will, by God's help, be Lady Pennywoddle, and my husband shall be a Peer, and shall have orders on his waistcoat. Ah, me! but she is a divine creature, and her eyes dived into mine like hot coals. In our country the cardinals would pine for her, and lazaroni serenade her—but she is too good for Pennywoddle."

"Tush!" said Mr. Dexter, throwing away his cigarette; "this is a secret be-

tween you and me, Prince. To-morrow Lady Mayrose is going to give her first 'At home' in Berkely Square, and everybody will be there. If you like to come with me I will introduce you to the host and hostess, to Sir Ham and to Miss Marvell; your own wit must do the rest."

CHAPTER III.

A SPLIT IN THE CABINET.

Prince Casino, having all confidence in his own wit, tripped away from the Albany to the Brummel Club, in St. James-street, of which he was a member. He was one of those exotics whom society loves to pet, and led a roving life of pleasure between Rome, Paris, and London, dining always in the best houses, gambling for high stakes, and paying his losses like a man; having acquaintances also among the great of this earth—to wit, bankers and statesmen, and being much in request among the tenderer sex, rather too much perhaps for his liking. He preferred London to other cities for the reason—which would have seemed unintelligible to any Briton of the middle classes—that it was the only place in the world where a titled man might do as he pleased. "In other countries," he said, "you have prying newspapers, or public opinion, or a severe clergy, or a military court which keeps a strict eye on you; but here nothing of the sort. Have a title, be rich, and the press will print nothing against you; public opinion classes you among the immaculate; the Bishop he gives you his blessing; and the Court it asks you now and then to an open-air breakfast." It is true Prince Casino was much indebted for his ideas of British liberty to the fact of belonging to the Brummel, the most mighty and exclusive of all clubs. It numbered but one hundred and fifty members, rejected you for one black ball in fifteen, and had a card room where whist at one hundred guineas the rub was the rule rather than the exception.

When Prince Casino had left the Brummel late in the small hours that morning the members were jocosely discussing whether the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Uphill, would allow Lady Downdale to appear at the next Drawing-Room; but now he found the place in strange commotion. Early as it was the reading-room was full, and the men were talking excitedly in groups.

"What is it?" said Prince Casino, accosting the best dressed man in London, Sir Windsor Chatt. "Has milady slapped Lord Uphill's ears?"

"Not so bad as that, Cass," replied Sir Windsor, dropping his eye-glass to see the Italian better. "It's only the Cabinet that's gone to smash."

Prince Casino pricked up his ears, and wedged himself into a circle, of which Dolly Drone and the Marquis of Chevychase, Violet Carol's young and handsome husband, were the centre, and here he learned that Mr. Paramount had just been explaining how he purposed parrying Mr. Paradyse's Home-Rule thrust. In a Cabinet Council held that morning the Premier had stated that Manhood and Female Suffrage could alone ward off this traitorous blow. He proposed meeting Mr. Paradyse's "resolutions" by a counter-set declaring "that in the opinion of this House it is inexpedient to debate on such a momentous question as the dismemberment of the Empire until the voice of the whole British people has been appealed to, and that in consequence this House is of opinion that the time has arrived for enfranchising all those of Her Majesty's subjects, of both sexes, who have reached the age of twenty-one years; and that furthermore, to the end that Her Majesty may be the more wisely advised as to the wishes of her people, the borough and county seats shall be re-distributed with a greater regard to the population of the constituencies."

A copy of this gallant motion was already stuck over the chimney-piece, and Dolly Drone was informing the circle that two members of the Cabinet had resigned, and that there would probably be more resignations before the day was over.

"Well, now, but your Paramount is a great man," cried Prince Casino, enthusiastically. "Those who desert him have no soul for fine statesmanship, and no stomach for a good fight, as your Shakespeare says. Is it not so, Doll?"

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"Don't ask Doll," laughed Sir Windsor; "he has not got his brother's orders yet, so doesn't know what he is to think."

Doll smiled thickly, riddening.

"Lord Stonehenge has resigned," said he, "and so has Mr. Sterling. I have not heard what my uncle intends to do. He and my brother are talking about it."

At this moment Lord Hornette came in briskly, but he was followed almost instantly by a Royal Prince, an assiduous frequenter of the Club, and conversation was hushed for a space, all the members standing up and lifting their hats. The Prince knew nothing of what occurred, or had the tact to pretend that he did not, for, after shaking hands with a few of his intimates, he said:—

"Well, Hornette, any news?"

"My uncle has resigned, sir," answered the Earl, naturally feeling that all interest must converge upon the attitude which the House of Bumblebeigh would assume at this crisis. "We have followed Mr. Paramount a good way, but we are not going to take this new leap in the dark."

"And who are to be the fresh Ministers?" inquired the Prince, easily.

"Mayrose will be one, I'll bet!" broke in Lord Chevy Chase, who was honoured with the Prince's friendship. "Mayrose used to be a good fellow at Eton, but he's become atrociously unscrupulous."

"It's your wife makes you say that," exclaimed Lord Hornette, drily. "I don't know what all the women have got against Mayrose, sir. They were mad about him one time; now they would stone him—and yet people want to give the suffrage to creatures of that sort!"

"Is not Mayrose down for admission to the club?" asked the Prince, amused.

"Yes, Your Royal Highness. I proposed him."

"And, Chevy Chase, Beaujolais, your brother Doll, and a number more are going to blackball him, laughed Prince Casino, who had from the first stood in the little throng gathered round H. R. H., and had adopted the smirky mien of an habitual courtier.

"If any blackball Mayrose they shall give their votes openly or I leave the Club," responded Lord Hornette, with a quick frown at his brother. "I have always detested the ballot in politics, and think that to keep it up in clubs in order to annoy or disgrace a man on the sly is inconsistent and contemptible. There are times, too, when a man should assert his likes or dislikes; and, if your Royal Highness does not object, I mean to convoke a general meeting to rescind our rules about secret voting. Let one black ball out of fifty exclude a man, if the committee like; but let us have things done above board."

It is not etiquette to debate on politics in the presence of Royalty, and as the Cabinet crisis was too engrossing a topic to be shelved, the Prince had the good taste to retire. Some of the other members speedily dispersed to gather fresher news at the Reform and Carlton, and Prince Casino emerged, deliberating as to which of his numerous lady admirers he should call on to retail the tidings he already possessed. But Dolly Drone and Lord Chevy Chase overtook him on the pavement, and addressed him with bitter reproof:—

"What the deuce did you tell my brother I was going to blackball Mayrose for?"

"Confound it, yes; a man keeps those things secret!" added Lord Chevy Chase.

"Mon pauvre Doll; I thought you English plumed yourselves on your courage?"

"Courage, hang it? Quarrel with a man who has been at school with you; who has forty thousand a year, and who may be in the Cabinet to-morrow?" said Doll, in deep disgust. "I am a younger son, you know. Hornette needn't care; he'd blackball the whole Royal Family, and brag about it."

"I'll blackball Mayrose openly, demme! but I'd much wather have done it on the quiet," drawled Lord Chevy Chase. "But look here, Cass, you must come to my house and explain to the ladies how you've put your foot in it."

"Yes, you come with us, Cass," groaned Doll. "Hornette has become as

hard as nails since his marriage has been adjourned, and I'm not going to fall out with him. He'd crumple me up like a bag, by Jingo."

The truth is, honest Dolly had meant to blackball Mayrose because Lady Coralmer had ordered him so to do. At heart he was on excellent terms with Mayrose, and rejoiced at his marriage because it had removed his most dangerous rival to Lady Coralmer's hand. The Marquis of Chevychase, who had liked Mayrose at school, was now the obedient servant of his wife, and having been assured by her that Mayrose had wickedly jilted Zellie, was disposed to go any lengths in hostility towards him for the sake of domestic peace—though inwardly he too objected to strife. Now Violet Chevychase was giving a luncheon party that day, at which divers promoters of the Boudoir Cabal were to meet and discuss the delicate question of accepting or refusing the invitations they had received to Lady Mayrose's first At Home on the morrow; so both Chevychase and Dolly were glad to thrust the curly-headed Italian Prince forward in order that he might confess to having rendered the black-balling difficult if not impossible, and become a scape-goat to the feminine wrath in their stead."

They walked to Lord Chevychase's house in Grosvenor Square, and Violet received them, surrounded by her court of fair Caballers. There was Lady Coralmer, whose husband was not dead yet, but then a brace of doctors had been brought over from the wilds of Germany, and had pledged their reputation, which was immense, that he could not survive three months at the farthest; and Lady Beaujolais was there, very anxious as to what she should bid her husband do in this Cabinet split, for if Lord Harkaway, the Master of the Buckhounds, resigned, then Lord Beaujolais ought to bide firm and get his place, whereas if Lord Harkaway stood his ground, then the Master of the Royal Beagles, having nothing to gain, ought perhaps to obey the dictates of his conscience and join the Secessionists. And Mrs. Coney Bussle was there, and Lady Canonlaugh, and Lady Charlotte Midge, and an altogether grand gathering of the Midge and Rodent connection. Violet stood among them, looking more beautiful, if possible, than before her marriage, and occupying almost four square yards of room with her azure-blue dress. She smiled to her husband, gave a nod to Dolly, and extended a hand to the seductive Italian, who took a foreigner's privilege and kissed it.

"But, bella marchesa, let me kneel at your feet," said he, cheerfully, "for I have a mea culpa to make," and he related of what things he was accused.

"Now, that is too bad!" pouted Violet, frisking her hand away from him. "You do not seem to understand that we must make those Mayrose's feel that all Society is against them without letting them know who their enemies actually are. You go and upset our best-laid schemes."

"I so entirely agree with you, my dear child," echoed virtuous Lady Canonlaugh, age thirty-six, teeth perfect, eyes holier than last year, religion more and more Evangelical.

"And do you know whether Lord Harkaway has resigned?" asked Lady Beaujolais of the contrite Prince.

"No. I think milord Harkaway holds to his place."

"Ah, those Harkaways were always grasping, and quite unprincipled. After what Mr. Paramount has done Lord Beaujolais would never consent—"

"But I believe Harkaway *has* resigned," said Lord Chevychase.

"Then the Buckhounds will be vacant! Dear me, I was going to add—after what Mr. Paramount has done he will be sadly in need of support, and I don't expect my husband will ever consent to add to his difficulties."

"It's not certain whether Harkaway resigns or stays," interrupted Dolly Drone, with authority.

"Altogether it will require time to decide how one ought to act in such a juncture," broke off Lady Beaujolais, coolly. "One never knows till after reflection what are the true merits of a case."

"Yes; but the question for us is how we shall act towards Lady Mayrose," exclaimed Violet. "No, Prince, I won't have you sit near me, because you have behaved badly. I vote we none of us go to Lady Mayrose's party; and then to

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morrow there is a Drawing-room, and we shall probably meet her there with her husband ; and we must cut them."

"They say Mayrose is going to get one of the seats in 'the Cabinet,'" remarked Lord Cheyrychase.

"Seat in the Cabinet ! Impossible !" cried Violet, starting. "Oh, but that would be just like him—a man without any convictions ready to sacrifice anything for place."

"Milord Rosemary—is he going to resign ?" inquired the Prince, without meaning harm.

"Oh, papa, he's quite different," rejoined Violet, blushing. "I don't know what he will do, but then he is Mr. Paramount's own friend."

"Lord Mayrose in the Cabinet !" exclaimed Lady Beaujolais, astonished, and she then felt in a cruel dilemma, for if her husband got the Buckhounds he and all the members of the Cabinet who remained faithful to Mr. Paramount would be expected to live at amity. She indeed for her part could not well remain at war with a Minister who had much patronage to dispose of. Business first, grudges afterwards. "But is the report true ?" said she.

"Whether it be or not, my dear Alice, can make no difference in our conduct as regards Lady Mayrose," observed Lady Canonlaugh, making room beside her for reluctant Prince Casino, whom she was piously trying to convert to Protestantism since that adventure at Richmond.

"No difference at all," chimed in Mrs. Bussle, who would never forget to her dying day how her chignon was knocked off.

"Well, I am glad to hear you say that, for it is a question of enforcing the dignity and sanctity of marriage," said Violet, taking wedlock under protection with all the augustness of a wife of four months' standing. "We should show no quarter to men who marry for money, and then want to force their vulgar wives on us. It is agreed then that we all send this woman to Coventry ?"

Lady Beaujolais made no reply ; but Mrs. Bussle and the Ladies Midge were loud in declaring that they would not attend Lady Mayrose's party ; and this was the more self-denying of them, as it so happened that they had none of them received invitations.

CHAPTER IV.

HER MAJESTY'S DRAWING-ROOM.

They had not been invited because Lady Mayrose had very soon after her marriage laid herself out to ascertain who were her husband's enemies, and had made up her mind to render them tit for tat. Affectionate wives are generally combative, and some of them introduce into the ordinary business of life more combat than is perhaps required. So it was with Mary. In marrying her Mayrose had not taken to wife any namby-pamby girl, but a sturdy little woman, who was resolved to be his helpmate, and would, if need were, have fought for him with mind, tongue, ay, or hands, till she dropped.

A year's wedded life had beautified her as it had Violet Carol, and she was inexpressibly happy—never suspecting that half her happiness arose from her husband being just the reverse of happy. Yet such was the case. The French, who have dug deep into these matters, assure us that in every match one of the parties loves whilst the other suffers himself (or herself) to be loved. Now, Mayrose had never loved Mary, and marriage had brought him all the moral misery which attends an ill-assorted union.

He had married a woman who could not think as he did ; and, though the tact of loving women is wonderful, and their genius for adapting themselves to their husbands' moods almost miraculous, Mary could not bridge over the gulf which education and early associations had put between them. Her brave little mind was impregnated with all the ethics of the counting-house, his with the ideas of a finished scholar and gentleman. From the hour when they had been joined, he had seen that he must lower to her level day by day, for that she would never

rise to his, and thinking of what a companion he would have found in Zellie, who was still free, and whom he now knew that he could have won had he spoken, his regrets were indeed poignant. But he let nothing of this be seen, and in his anguish lest his wife should suspect his sentiments, he pushed his demonstrations of tenderness towards her to limits that looked like worship. None but a good-hearted man could have acted as he did. Continually on the watch over himself, his face lit up in smiles at her approach; whatever she said or suggested, he assented to; even on points where women love to meet with a little resistance, he yielded to her; and, in fact, she ruled over him with a sway as absolute as any more ambitious woman could have dreamed of. Attributing this hourly kindness and deference to his love, there is no cause to wonder that she esteemed herself the happiest woman whom Heaven had ever blessed.

So happy that rumours of the Boudoir Cabal's hostility which had reached her—as such things always do through kind friends—made her shrug her small shoulders pityingly. On the morning after the split in the Cabinet she scanned a large heap of letters she had received from persons who had accepted invitations to her first party; and they were persons consequential enough to console her for any who might stay away. That was to be a busy day with her, for she was to be presented to the Queen "On her marriage." The Duchess of Bumblebeigh had graciously offered to present Lady Pennywoddle; Lady Pennywoddle was to present her daughter, and Mayrose, who had been presented at a previous Levee by Lord Albert Drone, his chief, was to attend as a bridegroom. As, however, it may please some readers to be reminded of what manner of pilgrimage is implied in attendance at a Drawing Room, we may as well recite what Mary had to go through.

First, there came to her at nine o'clock that great capillary artist, M. Frisemeche, who parted with half-an-hour of his time for a guinea. He arrived in a brougham, scampered up-stairs; expected to find her ladyship seated before her toilet-glass, with attendants ready, one with combs, brushes, and hair-pins, another with feathers, jewels, and veil, and in twenty minutes of breathless work he built up Mary's hair into a fabric which she was severely cautioned would all get disturbed if she did not carry her head upright. M. Frisemeche gone, there succeeded two young ladies from Madame Organdi, the milliner's, who were some hours fitting Mary's white dress, and satin train twelve feet long, which consummate finery was enhanced by a rare assortment of diamonds, and by the famous pearl necklace presented to her by the Worshipful Company of Sausage-Makers. Towards one o'clock Lady Pennywoddle arrived from Kensington with three ostrich-feathers on her head, and a train of crimson velvet; at the same time Mayrose left his dressing-room in an official blue swallow-tail, with gold on the collar and cuffs, white cashmere breeches and silk stockings, a straight sword and a cocked hat. Having with infinite precaution, lest he should stain their dresses, administered to his wife and mother-in-law a glass of champagne apiece and a sandwich, Mayrose swallowed a little wine himself, and then they all three drove away to St. James' in the family coach. It was a new one ordered for the purpose; had a dazzling hammercloth, a coachman with a three-cornered hat, a wig, and a bouquet, and behind it a pair of footmen whose gold lace, pink calves, flowers, long staves, and sublime triangular beavers evoked a cheer from a few dirty boys clustering at the corner of Hay Hill.

In Piccadilly there was a block which lasted half an hour, but by patient trust in Providence, and some shouting to the police by the footmen, the line managed to crawl on, so that not later than two hours after leaving Berkeley Square the coach drew up under the pent-house at the eastern entrance of the palace. Here the occupants of the coach were released, and, passing through a blaze of royal domestics, sailed down a long corridor, bordered on either side by sight-seers, dress-makers, milliners, friends of the household, tradesmen's daughters, and such like, all smartly dressed, and privileged to stand for a couple of hours and watch the company pass. From some not inaudible comments whispered by these bystanders, Mayrose gathered that his mother-in-law was carrying her train in a lump as if it were a bundle of linen for the wash, and he had to direct her as to how it should be borne easily, and gracefully, if possible, over the left arm. Lady Pennywoddle complied by looking at Mary, who had been well schooled by Madame Organdi's

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people, and the pair diverged to the left to face the new batch of sightseers congregated in a gallery above the first flight of stairs. Up these stairs, then to the left, then up some more steps, and, having prudently brought no shawls or wrappers to delay them in the cloak-room, the party streamed into the first reception-chamber. But here began the crush.

Her Majesty's loyal subjects, being numerous and impatient of admission to the Royal presence, wisely modelled their behaviour on that of audiences pushing at a pit entrance on Boxing night. Disdaining to use any of the rout-seats provided for them, they pressed forward all together as fast as they could go, in one glittering, rustling, headlong, babbling torrent till checked by a bar set up at the entrance of one of the grand drawing-rooms. There, some polite but firm door-keepers had to withstand the general and loudly expressed desire of everybody to keep up the helter-skelter to the finish; and the consequence was that hundreds of ladies, already flushed, discomposed, and rumped by their valiant struggles through the crowd, came to an inextricable tangle. One could hear such woeful dialogues as: "Please, will you allow me to pass? I have two daughters to present." "I can't indeed; I have girls, too, and this is their first drawing-room." "Dear me, mamma, my hair is coming down!" and mingling with these came spiteful interjections from dowagers whose skirts were being rent by spurs, and indignant gasps from old maids who felt their gray shoulders scraped by the helmets which officers of Life Guards or Dragoons were carrying under their arms. Some young ladies, maddened by the thought that if they were kept there long the Queen would be going away, so that they would have had all their dressing and worry for nothing, fairly sat down and cried; whilst their chaperons kept up a running fire of sarcasm against persons who attended the Drawing Room "having no sort of business there." However, everything has an end, and each time the bar was raised a bevy was tidied through, and rolled away on its course towards the "Pen"—a space railled off by a scarlet rope drawn down the length of the principal State-room, gorgeous with its human lining of Yeomen of the Guard, in red and gold.

Mayrose and his charges having cleared the bar, were enabled to reach the "Pen" in something like marching order; and then, by looking at the empanelled glasses to the left, they had the comfort of being able to see how much damage had been done them. A lock of Mary's hair was trailing over her shoulder, and a foot foot of the Brussels point-lace on her dress were gone. Lady Pennywoddle by squaring her elbows had got through more unscathed, but she had lost one of her ostrich feathers, and wanted to turn back and look for it. Other sufferers in front of them were piteous in their wailings. One lady had dropped a bracelet; another's train was giving way at the shoulder; a third's tiara had got displaced; a fourth moaned that she was going to faint, and her mother was crying out for a smelling bottle. By such impressive incidents is the majesty of Courts promoted, and true loyalty put to the test. No one grumbled. Some looked into the garden under the windows, and gasped like caged birds in envy of a pair of butterflies fluttering there; but the dominant feeling was that now all troubles were about to end, for the distance between the "Pen" and the Throne Room is short.

Lady Pennywoddle, apprised of the fact that she was about to behold Majesty, turned vermilion, and, if the truth must be told, regretted that she had not taken two glasses of champagne before starting to steady her nerves. Her confusion was not lessened by the jaunty politeness of a pair of satin pages, who at the door of the Throne Room delivered the ladies of their trains, and spread them out fair behind. They were nimble enough in this work, and then a Vice-Chamberlain, standing in the doorway, bowingly asked Lady Pennywoddle for her cards—large bits of pasteboard, with names of presenter and presentees legibly written out, as the Lord Chamberlain, Earl Uphill, had directed in the *Gazette*. He was standing with a basket beside him, was this mighty official; and when Mayrose, Mary, and Lady Pennywoddle at length entered the Throne Room, he read out their names with as courtly a lisp as if he were apologizing for something. Her Majesty stood in front of the Imperial arm-chair, with ladies and gentlemen in waiting behind her, a galaxy of Royal Princesses and Princes to her left, Ministers of State and Foreign Ambassadors grouped round and about her; and the array of stars,

jewels, royal graces and magnificence made up a sight so grand that Lady Pennywoddle would have been glad of some excuse to turn tail and depart without performing her act of fealty. But her name had been read; Lord Uphill dropped the card into his basket, and Lady Pennywoddle was fain to strut forward and kiss the Queen's hand. It was not a successful display. Though she had been laboriously coached, she clean forgot everything she had been taught, ducked like an applewoman, and would have tripped over her dress as she leaned had she not kept her balance by getting a firm grasp of her sovereign's fingers. Mary followed, and undulated through her curtsey and hand-kissing simply and gracefully enough, though not without growing very red; Mayrose made a profound bow in passing Her Majesty, and received a gracious bend of the head in return. He received something more, for in backing out he noticed the careworn but always impassive features of Lord-Treasurer Paramount fixed upon him with conspicuous benevolence. The glance was merely fleeting, however, for the pages caught up the ladies' trains, chucking them into their arms not over ceremoniously; and the important solemnity of presentation was terminated.

But alas! the getting home was another affair. "We shall be home in half an hour now," whispered Mayrose to his wife, as they left the Throne Room, ignoring, guileless man, that Royalty is fenced in with observances even as to the getting up one's coach. Mary was tired, and, now that the nervousness of presentation was over, felt inclined for some tea. Lady Pennywoddle could have tackled more substantial refreshment, but hungry or not the laws of St. James's Palace are as immutable as those which kept the Medes and Persians in such fine trim; so that one hour glided by, then another, then a third, and saw Mayrose and his party labouring towards the corridor where the sight-seers had been when they arrived. They saw plenty of friends and enemies, but friends and foes were in one draggle-tail confusion blent. Violet Chevy Chase, who had resolved to cut them, was sitting shivering on a bench with her train wrapped round her shoulders, her hair wild, her dress torn, and all the spirit gone out of her. Some of the ladies Midge were inert bundles of misery, straining their ears to catch, through the din of the crowd at the door, their names bawled by the scarlet servants, and drooping when the name of This or That, but never the name of Midge, clove the hot air. A man who should have appeared at this juncture with a teapot and a bag of rolls would have got his own terms, and been blessed into the bargain as a benefactor of his species.

Instead of any such Providence, Colonel Dandelion, the whip of Mr. Paramount's party, suddenly made his way towards Mayrose just as the latter was growing seriously concerned about Mary's weary face. Though she bore it very well, and smiled whenever he looked at her, he was fearful that she should break down with all this fatigue, to be followed by a hurried dinner, a second dressing, and then a long party without any possible interval of rest. Whilst he was making an effort to reach the door and expostulate with somebody, Colonel Dandelion stopped him:

"I say, Mayrose, I called at your house just after you had started, and posted after you here, hoping to catch you before this and have a talk. You're not going to desert us, are you?"

"No," said Mayrose, of whose arm the Whip kept a tight hold lest he should lose him in the surf of crowding persons. "No, I have been thinking over the matter since yesterday, and I suppose all that I saw in the papers was true, for Lord Albert was not at the office yesterday, and I have heard nothing official!"

"Oh, he has trimmed, and so have all the Drones—but you approve?"

"Viscountess Mayrose's carriage stops the way?" yelled two servants in an excited and injured tone, as if it were they who deserved most sympathy. It was then past seven o'clock.

"Yes, I approve," said Mayrose, "but I have no time to give you my reasons, for I see there's our carriage at last!"

"Well, as soon as you have set Lady Mayrose home, just drive to Downing-street; Paramount wants to see you."

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CHAPTER V.

PROMOTION.

Mr. Paramount's wish was, of course, to be obeyed. As soon as Mayrose could extricate his wife from the crush he drove home with her, and then, without waiting to dine or change his things, jumped back into his coach, and turned towards Downing-street. He apologized to Mary for leaving her thus abruptly; but the excitement of his summons had dispelled her weariness; and all the way from the Palace she had speculated with him as to what Mr. Paramount might be going to offer. She well knew by this time the hierarchical order of the different high beings of State, and could discriminate quite nicely between a post which entailed a seat in the Cabinet and one that did not. Said she, as her husband handed her out of the coach: "Mr. Paramount should give you the best thing at his disposal, and I am sure you ought to insist on it!" "I do not expect a seat in the Cabinet," he answered, smiling; "if I get the Telegraphs it will be very quick promotion." But at this she gave a little toss of her head, as devoted and admiring wives will.

Of the merits of the question which had caused this sudden disruption of the Cabinet Mayrose did not talk with his wife; but his mind was rather troubled on the subject, and he would have liked to see Lady Rosemary, whose tact could have advised him safely in such a crisis. Fortunately, it happened that just as he reached the Premier's door Lady Rosemary's coach drew up in front of his. She had brought her husband from the Palace, and, after leaving him here, was going home; but Mayrose alighted quickly and came to her coach-door as the footman was putting up the steps. He had not seen the Countess since his marriage; for she had been abroad all the winter with Zellie, and had but very lately returned. He was struck now with the change which this winter's absence had made in her. She looked sad and aged. The colour of her hair, which had been still young at their last meeting, had since settled into grey. She beamed upon him, however, with her usual affection, and complimented him upon Mary's pretty appearance at the drawing room. She had seen them both, but had been unable to get near them because of that distracting crowd. Then she came to political matters, and leaning on the window to speak to him more closely, said:—

"So Mr. Paramount is going to offer you a seat in the Cabinet. I was inexpressibly pleased when Lord Rosemary told me."

"I was not prepared for such high honour, dear Lady Rosemary," he answered. "But ought I to accept?"

"Yes, do. We none of us like these great reforms; but Mr. Paramount is our leader, and, as Lord Rosemary says, it is not fair to rebel against a man whom you have chosen to guide you. Besides, once radical reforms are brought forward now-a-days they become inevitable, and the Secessionists will not be able to prevent the changes; they will only break up their party."

"So I think. The desertion of the Drones is a great blow. I did not expect such depth of conviction from Lord Albert."

"Oh, the poor man had no part in his own resignation," sighed the Countess; "it was the Duke of Bumblebeigh, or rather Lord Hornette, who decreed it all. That is what makes the great strength of the Drones, that they obey the head of the family and act all together."

"Well, I think they have employed their strength amiss this time," replied Mayrose, calmly. "I never had a thought of resigning, and my only hesitation about accepting promotion arose from the fear of seeming to surrender my convictions for the sake of advancement. But to tell the truth, dear Lady Rosemary, I have few of my old convictions left. When things come to such a pass that the Opposition may count upon a speedy return to office by simply proposing to abolish something, it is useless attempting to govern. Ministers are exactly in the position of men who have a machine given them to work with, and who are stopped every minute by a mob who insist that before any work is done the whole machine shall be taken to pieces in order that a wheel may be added or removed."

"I think that is about the case, Freddy," said the Countess, rather wearily.

"Yes, but under such circumstances the whole thing becomes a farce," added Mayrose, with some excitement, considering that he was in the open air; "and I think the shortest way is to grant at one sweep all that can be conceded without revolution. When everybody has a vote we shall be able to go no further in the way of Parliamentary reform, and Ministers can then make a stand against Home Rulers, Socialists, and other rebels, whose only aim is to dismember the kingdom, and plunder property-holders. It will be the death of party government, for the ignorant constituencies will vote like one man with the landlords, who mostly belong to our side, and the Opposition seeing no chance of power for years will become *intransigentes*, irreconcilables, or what not. But with an overwhelming majority behind them, Ministers can laugh at mere talk, and they will have an opportunity of really governing—that is passing practical measures and making the country more habitable."

"I have thought of all that," answered Lady Rosemary, "and it is not the peasant voters I dread—I am afraid of the women."

"Oh! women are Conservatives," laughed Mayrose. "You will not get them voting for a change in the Constitution every five years. When I think of the queer packs of members whom the middle class constituencies have elected, and the feeble, selfish, spiritless policies which those same constituencies have invariably approved, especially in foreign matters, I'm sure the women can do no worse."

As Lady Rosemary was in a low dress, and Mayrose in a gilt coat and cocked hat, this interesting conversation could not be prolonged. Despite the dusk, a throng of loafers had gathered in the street to stare at the fine equipages, and exchange criticisms on the footmen's calves; and some newspaper reporters were hanging about to try and get early information of the Cabinet changes from under-clerks and office-messengers. So Mayrose took leave of the Countess, receiving her promise that she would be at his party by-and-bye, and then passed up the steps into the house. A porter reverentially swung back the doors for him, and handed him on to another, who conducted him without delay to Mr. Paramount's room.

It was the self-same room where Mayrose had been summoned more than a year before on the occasion of his tiff with Mr. Keane-Midge, and now, as then, Lord Rosemary and Sir Tito Tumb were present. All three Ministers shone in their gorgeous official vestments, but as it had been a Collar-day, and Lord Rosemary was a Knight of the Garter, he wore satin breeches, a gold collar, and blue velvet mantle, and was covered over with white satin bows, like the handsome quarters of meat exhibited after a cattle show. Mr. Paramount, starless after the modern wont of English Premiers, looked wan in contrast with the blaze of gold lace on his breast; but he received Mayrose with a kind, almost fatherly shake of the hand, and told him at once what his new place was to be. He wished him to accept the Secretaryship of State for Africa.

Now this sublime post was one which the Marquis of Stonehenge had vacated, and it was always bestowed upon Peers of the first magnitude, who generally obtained in virtue of it one of the first blue ribbons vacant. Mayrose had expected at most to get the Telegraphs, or the Keepership of the Parks, and, surprised as much as pleased at his startling rise, he ascribed it—and rightly so—to his marriage, which had ranked him among the first landowners. "So," thought he, "I am indebted to Mary for this." He bowed, muttering some confused thanks, and Mr. Paramount blandished him with one of those friendly compliments which oozed as naturally out of him as gum from a pear-tree.

"You have no need to thank me," said the Premier, "for you have done a great deal of excellent, unobtrusive work at the Australia Office, and the colonists are all saying that since you have been there their complaints have been attended to with civility. I would have asked you to succeed Lord Albert, but I feared you would insist upon dismissing Keane-Midge, and we are not strong enough to quarrel with the Midges now." He smiled, as he added: "It is Tumb who goes to the Australia Office."

"Yes," said Sir Tito, who fitted into round holes and square holes alike, and he gave a prudent nod which seemed to bode a long reign of peace to all the Midges. Then sunny Lord Rosemary patted Mayrose on the shoulder, and in his turn felici-

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tated him : " We have been regretting that you were not a commoner, Freddy," he said, blandly. " You might have become Chancellor of the Exchequer instead of poor Stirling, whose wife, they say, is pecking him terribly for resigning."

" Yes, indeed, you would have done well at the Exchequer," approved Mr. Paramount; " and as Ministers are responsible to both Houses, I think it is a pity we do not follow the continental custom of letting Ministers speak and defend their acts before either House. It would relieve us of much trouble in forming a Cabinet; for, as things are, I think I shall have to take the Exchequer myself. However, we have a good deal to talk about. You see the whole press is against us. Could you not induce Mr. Dexter, who edits your father-in-law's paper, to back us up every day with a political leader?"

" I will speak to him about it," answered Mayrose, who had seen little of Mr. Dexter for some time. " The *Reporter*, though, as you know, does not go in for politics."

" Yes, but it has a circulation of 300,000!" cried Sir Tito Tumb, like a well-informed man as he was. " Egad! the clerks and shop-people read nothing else. Couldn't that Dexter give us a column of Parliamentary reports—racyly done, you know, like those of the Divorce Court, and throwing ridicule on the other side—and then a leader; it would only take him two columns, and we would give him heaps of special information?"

" Mr. Dexter is undeniably a clever man," chimed in Mr. Paramount. " If our Bill passes, your county will be divided into fifteen electoral districts, Mayrose, and six of the seats will be almost in your gift. You would do us a great service if you brought in Dexter on our side."

Mayrose explained that, although half the *Reporter* belonged to Sir Ham Pennywaddle, Mr. Dexter had the entire management of it, and had stipulated from the first to be independent. Nevertheless, he undertook to sound this valuable man; and the pledge was given sitting down, for Mr. Paramount had asked him to take a chair, and the new Minister was made to feel the confidential footing on which he had been suddenly placed as regards the discussion of State business. An instance of this was afforded him immediately afterwards, when he was taken into council on the subject of appointing a new Lord Chamberlain in the room of Earl Uphill, who had resigned that very afternoon, to the chagrin of the whole court and of his chief.

" Uphill gave in his resignation after the Drawing-room, and I was quite unprepared for it," said Mr. Paramount, dejectedly.

" Well, he is as sorry to resign as we are to lose him, for he does not disagree with us," observed Lord Rosemary, trifling with a smile at his gold collar-chain. My wife says he was in great distress about excluding Lady Downdale from the Queen's party. The Queen left him free to follow his own discretion, and Lady Uphill insisted that Lady Downdale shouldn't get an invitation. But Downdale was heard to swear at the Brummel that if his wife was slighted he would send Uphill a challenge, and Uphill isn't a lion."

" At all events it's very harassing," remarked Mr. Paramount, " for the post is most difficult to fill. Harkaway would do, but he wants to keep the Buckhounds."

" Why not offer the place to Beaujolais?" suggested Mayrose, giving his first piece of advice in council.

" Oh, Beaujolais would never do, because of his wife," protested Sir Tito Tumb, evidently expressing the opinion which would be Lady Tumb's. " When a Chamberlain has a young wife she makes out the Queen's invitations from her own visiting-lists, and always has a number of enemies whom she is delighted to snub in the Queen's name."

" I thought, too, that Lady Beaujolais was a pet foe of yours, Mayrose, observed Mr. Paramount, a little amused. " Didn't she head a Boudoir Cabal against you, and isn't she busy now assailing your fair fame?"

" I daresay she is," answered Mayrose, carelessly; " but she and Beaujolais would make a capital Lord Chamberlain."

"So they would," assented Lord Rosemary, tickled at the word. "They would give no trouble to French authors nor to ballet-dancers' skirts."

"And I think we might trust her to prevent our being caricatured in the pantomimes," echoed Sir Tito Tumb, relenting. "Uphill wasn't half strict enough. He let one of the theatres bring me on the stage as a dwarf jack-pudding, making the whole town laugh," and hereat this eminent Statesman looked rueful. "I see, though, it's time for me to go," he added. "When shall I kiss hands, Paramount?"

"Your names will be sent to the Queen to-night, and you and Mayrose can come to Windsor to-morrow," answered the Premier, with a glance at Mayrose, to see if the arrangement suited him. "Tweedledee, who takes your place, will go with us."

This matter settled, and Sir Tito Tumb having nothing more to say, but wanting his dinner, for it was past nine o'clock, vanished, half extinguished under a cocked hat of the old style, curved like a sickle; but Mayrose lingered some minutes to receive instructions as to taking over his department from Lord Stonehenge. On the morrow the seals would be formally remitted to him in Her Majesty's presence, and then the ex-Secretary would put him in possession of all the office information in the courteous way that is usual. Mr. Paramount expressed no regret at parting with Lord Stonehenge—it was not his way to express regret—and Mayrose was free to infer that the Premier thought him more than a substitute. Mr. Paramount made a gracious observation as to having received an invitation to Lady Mayrose's party, and said he would certainly snatch an hour from his present cares to be there; and upon this Mayrose withdrew. Going down stairs, the new Minister met Lord Beaujolais, who was coming up with a suffused countenance, having evidently just heard from Sir Tito Tumb the rumour of his probable appointment to the Chamberlaincy. He stopped, with the right foot on one step and the left on another one a yard lower down, and thus astraddle held out his hand.

"Is it true that"—"I am to be Lord Chamberlain," he was about to add, but corrected himself—"that you are African Secretary? If so, let me wish you joy."

"Let me wish *you* joy of the Chamberlaincy," said Mayrose, good-humouredly, though he was not unaware that the Master of the Beagles had talked of blackballing him for the Brummel; and hereon Lord Beaujolais's emotion so mastered him that he could only mutter, "You'll find my wife in the carriage; we met Tumb coming out just as we drove up, and he told us of your kindness," saying which he bolted upstairs to see whether the much-coveted Golden Key was truly to be his.

Mayrose could not help laughing; he ran down stairs, and sure enough saw pretty Lady Beaujolais concealed in a far corner of her coach, and peering up at the gloomy facade of the Premier's house—the last house in the world, judging by outwards, to be a cornucopia for honours. Now we have already said that it was quite against her ladyship's inclinations and principles to quarrel with a man who was going to have all the good things of Africa in his gift, besides which she had been as much touched as astonished to hear from Sir Tito that Mayrose had spoken in her husband's favour. However, having persistently shunned and maligned her benefactor for more than a twelvemonth, she could not decently make it up with him unless he first offered her an apology; and this Mayrose had the good sense to comprehend. Lifting his hat he came to her coach window and made her a nice bow.

"I feel I have been offending you in some way, Lady Beaujolais, and want to be forgiven; else I am afraid you will be excluding my wife from the Court balls."

"Why, how do you do? What an age it is since I've seen you," simpered her ladyship, putting forward one of her small hands with delicious coolness. "I have been quite delighted to hear that you have been placed in the Cabinet; you know how I predicted you would rise."

"Yes, you did; and I hope my new post will give me some opportunity of being useful to you," said Mayrose, demurely.

"Oh, do you really mean what you say?" replied the fair-haired Countess, catching this promise deftly by the ear. "I daresay I might have something to ask of you some day, because you have always been very nice and obliging, and one doesn't like to refuse you a favour. But tell me: Lady Mayrose gives her first

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party to-night, and I have been looking forward to it with such pleasure. Everybody tells me she is charming, and I am dying to know her! You may expect me quite early."

And here let none gainsay the value of social graces, for it is much sweeter to be humbugged in this way than to be dealt with on principles of strict truthfulness.

CHAPTER VI.

LORD HORNETTE'S EMBASSY.

Mayrose was right glad to get home and have a quiet dinner with his wife, preparatory to all the fatigue of this famous "first party." He dined in her boudoir—the dining-room being in the hands of the decorators—and the servants were sent away that she might wait on him herself. Her wifely eagerness was great to know all that had been said; how Mr. Paramount had looked; who else had been there; and she sat close to his chair in a *peignoir*, which she had put on before dressing again for the evening, and with her bright chestnut hair falling over her shoulders. They were alone, for Lady Pennywoddle, grown ravenous by her too-prolonged homage to Majesty, had gone back to Kensington to dine with Sir Ham; and Mary, by her husband's desire, had taken something immediately on reaching home, so that she had no appetite now. She was all ears and eyes, listening to Mayrose's description of the interview in which so signal an honour had been conferred on him.

He related everything in the way he thought would most amuse and please her; and he was obliged to repeat three times at her bidding Mr. Paramount's little compliment to himself, and then numberless times to narrate how he should have to kneel on one knee before the Queen, and receive the box of seals which Lord Stonehenge had surrendered. After this, anxious as he always was to make her happy, he turned, and said in a kind tone, "These are the first fruits of our marriage, Mary. I should never have obtained this if you had not raised me out of the ruck of small peers."

"Oh!" she said, quivering all over, "your own genius would have obtained you anything you chose to try for;" but her eyes brimmed, for there is music in the way of saying things, and her husband had spoken with exquisite tact and tenderness to make her feel that their marriage had been a blessing to him.

"Yes, Mary," he repeated, holding out a hand affectionately to her, "I shall owe my fortune to you, for when a man gets this post at my age he becomes a possible Prime Minister. I have never known it given to anyone under the rank of earl before; and I shouldn't wonder if Paramount asked you soon whether you would like to be a Countess."

She rose, threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him on the forehead, then fled from the room; for her happiness was such that she dared not trust herself to speak. There are moments like this in life, when the heart is steeped in a joy so ineffable that it seems to defy future misery, and sets on the brow an aureola almost angelic. All Mary's guests that evening were to be struck by the radiance of her beauty, and those who had picked up the *on dit* as to Mayrose having married for money may have felt that, money or not, this pretty, smiling, charmingly-dressed Lady Mayrose must have been well worth winning for her own sake. The fact is, her whole soul was shining through her eyes. When she fled from her husband's presence, with his words of love ringing on her ear, and with her heart vibrating under that most exulting thought which can possess a wife, that she has been of use to him and is adored—then verily her quick feet were touching the border-land of heaven.

Mayrose watched her go, and drew a short sigh, then rose from the table, for it was ten o'clock, and the decorator's men and the florists having invaded all the other rooms, wanted now to beautify the boudoir. He went up to his dressing-room to exchange his uniform for evening clothes; and whilst committing himself to Bino's hands found his thoughts unwillingly but obstinately turn on Zellie, who he supposed had now returned to England, and whom he was liable to meet again

at any moment. Every time Zellie's image came into his mind he tried to banish it, but this time he strove without success. He could not help musing how different from anything he could expect of Mary would have been the aid which Zellie would have given him in his new position. She could not have bestowed on him more affection, but with what an easy dignity she would have stepped into her high rank; what reliance he could have placed on her power to charm his enemies and win him friends, and what a comfort he could have derived—and what strength also—from living in a daily family intimacy with Lady Rosemary, and Violet Chevrechase, who was now abusing him everywhere. These thoughts were selfish, and he felt ashamed of them, but he had an indefinable dread that Mary would not be equal to her station, and would commit mistakes which would make her cruelly suffer—not to speak of himself. Had he loved her more the thought would not have troubled him, for he would have felt confidence in his power to guide her rightly, but it is one of the penalties men pay for cold-heartedness that it robs them of intuition. Mayrose might have seen that his wife's surpassing love for him would enable her by his advice and assistance to play any part he required; he did not see this, but shrank from wounding her sensitiveness by advice, and felt solitary.

He was interrupted in the midst of his musings by an unexpected visit from Lord Hornette. Bino, in the act of stretching his master's gloves, was summoned by a footman, who said that the earl was in the study down stairs, and wished to see his lordship particularly, and without a moment's delay. Wondering what this sudden event could betoken after the other excitements of the day, Mayrose hurried on his dress-coat, and ran down. Before he was fairly in the room, Lord Hornette stepped forward to meet him, and exclaimed, eagerly—

"It's not true, Mayrose, that you've already accepted office of Paramount?"

"Yes, it is. I was sent for after the drawing-room."

"Confound it!" cried the Earl, pulling at his moustache, and making a violent gesture of anger. "Look here—I had come to ask you to help us in ousting Lord Paramount from his leadership. But it's not too late yet. You can still back out. Listen!" And Lord Hornette, impatiently shutting the door, began a feverish explanation as to a plot formed at Bumblebeigh House for throwing over the too slippery Mr. Paramount, and installing a new Ministry, with the Duke of Bumblebeigh for its chief—Lord Stonehenge, Mr. Stirling, Lord Albert Drone, Mayrose himself, Mr. Coney Bussle, and some other Secessionists, for its prominent members.

Lord Hornette had evidently been racing about all day. His clothes were dusty, his hair rumpled, and his features tired; and this, coupled with the sour expression which his face had worn ever since his marriage had been adjourned, gave him a very peevish appearance. He declared that a most determined effort was being made to wrench Mr. Paramount's supporters from him. It was time to stop this break-neck course of down-hill policies, and if desertions could be so multiplied that the Premier found it impossible to reconstruct his Ministry, he might throw up his leadership in disgust, and then the party could be remustered under the Duke of Bumblebeigh. It was notorious, cried the Earl, that few of Mr. Paramount's followers approved the Universal Suffrage Bill, which could only be passed by coalition with the most Radical of Mr. Paradise's party; and if the fifty or sixty Secessionists made a firm stand, and showed themselves able to form a Cabinet, they might at the eleventh hour wile away the whole of Mr. Paramount's forces from their allegiance. "You see," said he, "we would have a Ministry that would appeal to honest men of all parties, by gad! This repetition of clap-trap Reform Bills isn't English—we're becoming like the French or the United States."

"I agree with you there, and that's why I think Reform Bills should be stopped once and for all," answered Mayrose. "As to universal suffrage, I'm not afraid of it. Napoleon III. showed us, by the example of those very French, that peasant votes could be made thoroughly Conservative."

"Yes, with prefects, gendarmes, and all that—not with agricultural unions stumping about the country. At all events, you refuse?"

"I must, Hornette, for I have given my promise to Paramount; and, what is more, I approve what he is doing. But you can act as you purpose without me."

"No, hang it, that's the rub! You're more important than you think," rejoined the Earl, in exasperated agitation. "People have been talking about you at the clubs all day. You have made a hit in the Lords, and then since your marriage you have landed influence, and through your father-in-law, a footing in the city, and then that *Reporter* is half yours, and might become the next power after the *Times* in your hands. Dandelion has been saying everywhere that you will be the virtual Leader in the Lords, now that Stonehenge has resigned, for Lobby, the Foreign Sec., doesn't come up to your heel; and, to tell you the truth, if you won't join us we shall give up our plan, for it will look as if we had only the fogeys and none of the rising men on our side."

Much as it might depress him to be alienated from the fogeys, it could not but gratify Mayrose to be addressed in such a deferential way by Lord Hornette, who had always treated him with friendly respect, but never before acknowledged him as a first-class power. "I am very sorry," he said, resting an elbow on the mantelshelf; "but if you will take my assurance for it your plan would have had no chance of success. You cannot resist the popular flood nowadays. The most you can attempt is to dyke and direct it, and that is what we are going to do."

"Well, 'pon my soul, if anybody had told us at Eton that you would throw in your lot with a pack of Radicals we shouldn't have believed it," ejaculated the Earl, tossing his hands aloft in despair. "Just fancy a man of your blood following an upstart like Paramount!"

"I think that the fact of Paramount's being an upstart is the only reason why you turn against him," replied Maryrose, shifting his position, and taking the defence of his chief rather warmly. "If he had been one of our set at Eton and at College you would have found no fault with his acts."

"Because an Eton man would never have run a muck at traditions and decency in this way," asserted the heir of the Bumblebeighs, with emphasis. "By George! a man oughtn't to be allowed to lead a party unless his family have been statesmen for a hundred years, and have taught him to be patriotic and that kind of thing. But as to you, Mayrose, you know what people say about your conduct. You've a pack of enemies—Midge and Rodent women whom you've offended somehow, and they'll get swearing that you only cling to Paramount because you were a place-hunter, and wanted to become an earl. They've already said that you're a fortune-hunter, and I gave them the lie, by Gad! But these things stick to a man. Here, now, don't be huffed, but just before I came here I saw Chevy Chase and his wife, Mrs. Bussle, and some more of them, and I told them we had all put reliance on you. Well, the women giggled, and Violet Chevy Chase said you would spin round like a weather-cock to whichever side your profit lay. Come, show all that spiteful lot that they've misjudged you."

At this moment Mary rustled quickly into the room, one coruscating blaze of silks and jewels, and sparkling eyes. She thought her husband was alone, and on discovering her mistake ought to have withdrawn, and would have done so, had she been trained to the usages of high life. But she had overheard Lord Hornette's last word, and gathering that her husband stood in peril through women's tongues, rushed speedily and with uncalled for valiance to the rescue:

"Oh, Lord Hornette, how can it matter what a number of ill-natured women say?" exclaimed she, with a scornful pout. "I have been told about them all. There's odious little Lady Beaujolais, who is as affected as a doll, and Lady Coral-mere, who dances about whilst her husband is dying, and that Lady Canonlaugh! I am sure Lady Canonlaugh had better mind what she is about, for if I hear of her saying things——"

"Lady Beaujolais is not against us, my dear," said Mayrose, with an appealing glance, and colouring. "She spoke to me very kindly two hours ago, and is coming to your party to-night."

Mary was all meekness in an instant. To anybody who was her husband's friend she would have knelt on both knees, but it was bitter to her to think of Lady Canonlaugh, and her hazel eyes flashed sparks. Lord Hornette, a connoisseur

seur in women's beauty, was much surprised by her fresh loveliness and by her intrepid readiness of tongue. She was not at all the mild miss he had known before her marriage, and his lordship jumped to the natural conclusion that Mayrose did not wear the hat in his own household.

"Well, Lady Mayrose, if you approve of your husband's course, I have nothing further to say," he answered. "Only Mayrose and I are old friends, and I thought it well to warn him of the proverb that 'A good name is better than a gold belt.'"

"My husband will always have a good name, for, luckily, it is not such women as Lady Canonlaugh who can take it from him," responded Mary, stoutly; "but you must remain true to us, Lord Hornette, for we value your esteem. You are a man every inch."

Lord Hornette made the bow of a perfect gentleman and retired, but with a disappointed and vexed frown on his brow. He was vexed, because in the first place he always objected to be thwarted; and in the next, because he was truly concerned about the incipient rottenness of this State of England, and would have gloried to see the house of Drone assert its power by forcing Mr. Paramount from the helm. The brougham that bore him away in dejected irritation crossed some carriages which were conveying the first-comers among the innumerable throng who were going to flood Mayrose House that night, anxious to see the new Cabinet Minister whom the Party Whips were vaunting as one of Mr. Paramount's trump cards.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY MAYROSE "AT HOME."

Mayrose House had been well prepared for its guests, and shone with a profusion of light, flowers, mirrors, and new French furniture. Mayrose was not one of those whose attachment for relics of the past fastens itself on old chairs and sofas, so during his honeymoon the residence of his fathers had been given over to upholsterers and painters, who had made it as unlike its former self as a lady's dress of our day is different to the heavy brocades of seventy years ago. There was a drawing-room furnished altogether in mauve satin and pale lilac, another in dark blue, a third in crimson. Mary's boudoir, committed to the romantic fancy of a Parisian, had come out daintily fresh in ivory panels, azure-blue flowered satin, white lace, and Dresden ornaments. In all the rooms the ceilings and wood-work had been painted by skilled artists; shapely crystal chandeliers glittered with a thousand facets, and had their brilliancy reflected in glasses so disposed as to open up endless avenues of illumination; in short, the house thus renovated had become the fit home for a bride.

It produced a very favourable impression in the serried hordes of visitors, whose carriage doors banged in the Square below far into the small hours; for somehow, whether from friendship or curiosity, it seemed as if all London had mustered for Lady Mayrose's party. It is true the times were stirring, and justified any amount of curiosity. If Mr. Paramount could reconstruct his Ministry, the debate on Mr. Paradyse's Home-rule resolutions and on the Premier's amendment thereto would be commenced on the next night but one after this; and in all the clubs, drawing-rooms, and places of polite resort, the splendid audacity of Mr. Paramount's "Great Move" was being discussed with gushing enthusiasm or intense bitterness, according as the disputants loved their politics hotly or mildly. Under the circumstances it was only natural that people should hasten to stare at the young Peer, whom some knew to be already a Minister, and whom the rest had heard spoken of as likely to be one before the week was out; it was natural, too, that they should wish to see any other Ministers who might be present at the party, in order to watch how they bore themselves in this crisis. Such, indeed, was the rush that, there being no other Ministerial "At Home" that evening, a great many people came who had not been invited, and among them some of the Midge and Rodent caballers, who arrived bravely under the chaperonage of friends.

Ladies never play quite fair. So far as regards the malice and talking required in a conspiracy you may trust them, but when it comes to staying away from festive entertainments, weakness arises among them and backsliding.

Mary stood in the first reception room and received her guests with shakes of the hand or smiling bows; and it was admirable to see how this little creature, who had been on her feet all day, bore up against a fatigue which to Mayrose seemed severe. It is possible that ladies never feel tired when well-dressed and admired, for certainly Mary appeared to derive new strength from the compliments of every succeeding batch of great personages who during two hours streamed past her. The Duke and Duchess of Bumblebeigh came with Lord and Lady Albert Drone, although they had heard just before starting that Mayrose refused to join their league, it did not suit them to show they were offended; and Lord Stonehenge, Mr. Stirling, and some other of Mr. Paramount's runaways, came too, following the British principle of not letting public differences interfere with private friendship. As to the Ministers in office—from the Earl of the Lobby, the Foreign Secretary, with his Garter ribbon, to Sir Tito Tumb, the politician of all work—they were present to a man; and it was not the least curious scene in this Vanity Fair to note the well-bred efforts of Partizans and the Secessionists to look quite civil and mutually forgiving when they met. When they could, they, of course, avoided one another; and soon this became easy, for the rooms filled one by one, and people got caked together like sardines, the staircases being the while encumbered by crowds who could neither get up nor go down. As usual, the invitations had been issued with a splendid disregard to the area of space available, and many ladies who had had their Court dresses ruined at St. James' in the morning, must have spoiled other dresses and been half squeezed to death at this Berkeley Square party; but they were probably among the foremost in their belief that they had spent a truly happy day, for heroism takes many shapes. When the whole suite of rooms was crowded to suffocation, the host and hostess retired into the chief saloon, and those who could sidle near them observed that the Duchess of Bumblebeigh showed much civility to Lady Mayrose, that Lady Rosemary sat beside her all the evening, and that the seductive Lady Beaujolais laughed and chatted with her, and was most sisterly. As for Mayrose, he was surrounded by a clump of his colleagues, and by-and-bye these dropping away, left him conversing on the hearth-rug alone with the Premier. Mr. Paramount, like Napoleon III., had a trick of fastening his eyes on the carpet and of replying by slow nods, as if he tacitly agreed with everything that was said. At a time when onlookers were conjecturing that he and the new African Secretary must be conferring on a matter of great State moment—perhaps the Universal Suffrage Bill—he was relating to Mayrose how he had introduced the culture of beet root on his estate, in the hope that it might be manufactured into sugar.

There was no dancing, but a string band played in one of the rooms, alternating with some Transylvanian flutists, the lions of the day, who skreeled away in a remote chamber because their music was too emphatic to be heard close. At one o'clock a supper was served, and then the martyrs on the staircase had their reward, for, being nearest to the ground-floor, they surged into the supper-rooms, one on the top of the other, as if they had been famished for a month past. Ortolans, plovers' eggs, lobster salad, truffled turkeys, and champagne were cleared away at a rate and with an appetite which suggested fears as to what might have been the fate of all these voracious people, if no food had been provided.

It was at supper time that Mayrose first had the opportunity of seeing his father-in-law. He took the Duchess of Bumblebeigh down to supper, but her Grace would accept nothing save an ice, and this finished, begged to be escorted to her carriage. So Mayrose let her out, but coming back across the hall, he was waylaid by Sir Ham Pennywoddle, who had apparently been dogging him.

"Look'ee 'ere, this is a fine party, my lud," said the Knight, sponging his hot brow with his white gloves. "I never saw such a lot of the quality assembled together; and now I've got to congratulate yer on becoming a Minister, as I told yer you would be afore your marriage."

"My marriage has brought me good luck in every way," answered Mayrose,

wringing Sir Ham's outstretched hand with the kind respect he always showed this honest relative.

"Aye, and it's a blessing to me to see what a good husband you make for my Mary," proceeded Sir Ham, towing his son-in-law by waddling stages as it were towards a corner under the stairs, where they could not be intruded upon. "But now I want to ask you summat. Muster Paramount's here. Has he chosen 'is Chancellor of the Exchequer yet?"

"No, I believe not. Sterling was a good man, and is not so easy to replace."

"Well, now, jist listen," whispered the Knight, rubbing his large red ears shyly. "Why shouldn't I be Chancellor of the Exchequer?"

Mayrose stared, but his surprise left him no power to speak. Sir Ham continued, purple in the face, but bold:—

"You see, it's all in my line o' business, and parties have been sayin' to me that now you was in a fair way of being Minister I oughtn't to stick to the city as I did afore. Next year, or the year after, my turn'll come for being Lord Mayor; but I've been thinking I'd resign my Aldermanship, because it don't look well for a Peer like you, who'll be an Earl and a K. G. soon, to have a father-in-law sitting as a magistrate in the Guildhall, and looking ridiculous in a red gown at the Lord Mayor's Show. Parties say it would be more suitable for you if I was in the Cabinet too; —or if that can't be—why, perhaps you'd ask the Prime Minister to make a Peer of me. I'd like to be a Peer."

Mayrose stared more and more, and doubted his father-in-law's sanity. To be sure, if he had kept his eyes about him, he might have observed that Sir Ham had altered in more than one respect during the past year. His hair had stopped greying, and was perceptibly turning to a brown, muddy colour. He was more careful about the cut of his clothes. He had purchased a pamphlet on fatness, and was dieting himself on rusks and claret, according to its prescriptions. Then the city honours he had once coveted, with the ambition which should animate every loyal sausage-maker, seemed to have grown paltry in his sight, and his general talk indicated that he was obeying the inspirations of somebody—presumably the "parties" he cited—who had put him out of conceit with his old life, and filled his head with novelties. Mayrose had not heeded all this, but now, recalling stray symptoms of this folly, or whatever else it was, his face expressed such bewilderment that the Knight lapsed sheepish.

"You ain't angered, Mayrose?"

"You took me aback, that is all," coughed Mayrose, evasively. "I should have thought you preferred the House of Commons to the Lords."

"It's parties that have advised me," wheezed Sir Ham, whose flushed countenance the gas lit up like a ruddy Dutch cheese. "Parties told me I ought to 'ave ambition."

"I believe Mr. Paramount means to keep the Exchequer," said Mayrose, nervously, as if he were pondering what argument he should adduce if the Knight urged his absurd claims with determination. "As to peerages, you know, they are only bestowed after long party service."

"Well, I see you object," remarked the Knight, ruefully; "but look 'ee 'ere"—and his manner grew humble as a school-boy's as he laid a fat hand on his son-in-law's arm—"couldn't you give me some reason why I shouldn't be a Peer or sit in the Cabinet—reasons writ on paper, that I may show 'em to the parties. When parties say to me, 'You ought to be this, that, and 'tother,' I dunno 'ow to answer 'em; but if you coached me I might feel kind o' easier."

The Transylvanian flutists, who struck up in an adjoining room so loudly as to drown all other sounds, dispensed Mayrose from complying immediately with this strange request. He promised to talk the matter over with Sir Ham at another time, and walked towards the supper-room, feeling in no slight way alarmed at his relative's unexpected outburst, and wondering much who the misguided "parties" could be.

If he had consulted Mr. Dexter, that gentleman would have revealed to him that these parties were none other than Grace Marvell, who was at that moment under his roof, and had been attracting as much attention and admiration through-

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out the evening as she always did wherever she went. Mayrose met Mr. Dexter in the doorway of the supper-room, and remembering that he was commissioned to canvass him about the *Reporter*, addressed him on the subject there and then. The Editor hearkened deferentially, for, though the *Reporter* had become so great a success in his hands that it had distanced the circulation of every other daily in Europe, it was still in part Sir Ham's property, and Sir Ham and Mayrose were one. Besides, Mr. Dexter had a belief in the *condottiere* talents of Mr. Paramount, and believed his to be the winning side. There could be no danger of ruffling the *Reporter's* public by the advocacy of such a measure as universal suffrage, and the Editor's cool vanity was soothed at being talked to in public by a Minister whose rapid rise had astonished him, and whose name would in a few hours be canvassed all over England.

"If you could make your Parliamentary reports as much as possible like your legal, you would render us a service," suggested Mayrose, following out his instructions. "Little comments on the appearance and manners of the members, you know. People read and laugh at those things."

"You are learning very early to 'nobble' the press, my lord," laughed Mr. Dexter, with a bow.

"Oh, we do not wish you to do anything you conscientiously object to," answered Mayrose, with a touch of superciliousness. He felt that involuntary contempt for the press which is bred in the bone of British noblemen, and comes from the fact that the press has never risen here to be that terrible power for good or evil which it is in some other lands. Abroad, individual journalists stir up the people and promote revolutions; in Britain, newspapers follow the lead of the Party wire-pullers, instead of controlling them. The difference is great. However, Mayrose added, "If we pass the Suffrage Bill my help may assist you in getting back to Parliament. If you decide on returning to a career where you would be certain to succeed, you may rely on me—"

Mr. Dexter bowed again, and could not but admire the easy celerity with which the young Peer had entered into the time-honoured spirit of British statesmanship. He strolled away as leisurely as the swarms of feeders would permit him, and looked for Prince Casino, who had come with him to be introduced to Sir Ham Pennywoddle and Grace Marvell, with a view to effecting that Rio-Brigande loan. Threading himself a path through squads of gentlemen, and servants racing about with plates and bottles, and carefully avoiding treading on the skirts of ladies who had abandoned all concern about their flowing robes in their one absorbing anxiety to eat, he discovered the Italian catering for Lady Beaujolais, and radiating smiles and blandishments around him as usual. He managed to beckon him away, and introduced him to Sir Ham, who was packed in a corner talking to Sir Tito Tumb; then he conducted him to Lady Pennywoddle, whom some gay Foreign-office clerks appeared to be politely roasting whilst she disposed in a business-like way of a plate of soup. Neither the Knight nor his wife had much to say to Prince Casino, but this was only because the crowd was so great and the clinking of forks and glasses so vehement; otherwise, they were much impressed by his title. Mr. Dexter next cast his eyes about him for Grace Marvell, and desisted her being ministered to by young men without number—a very court.

Miss Marvell was beginning to conquer a position in society. Going everywhere under Lady Pennywoddle's chaperonage, or that of Lady Mayrose, she was accepted as a kind of adopted daughter of the Knight's. Her extraordinary beauty and exquisite manners caused her to be admired with more than rapture by one sex and cordially hated by the other; but, then, the fact that she was the daughter of a man "under a cloud," and portionless, prevented the weightier among her adorers from evincing any serious intentions. Those who hinted to her of intentions were mainly detrimentals—Government clerks, officers, young barristers; people who, having nothing, were prepared at a month's notice to share it with an expensive wife. Her tact was directed to keeping these aspirants at a proper distance without offending them; and, excepting Quilpin Leech, who might generally be seen in her train, none of her worshippers could have boasted that they had got far into her intimacy.

Mr. Dexter passed tranquilly through the detrimentals like a lion among puppies, and approaching Grace, said :

"Miss Marvell, will you allow me to present to you the Prince of Casino?"

"I have much longed for this presentation, Miss Marvell," murmured the Italian, advancing and laying his crush hat on his heart. "I had the great happiness of one night seeing you at the Opera."

"You have an excellent memory, I see," she answered, laughing, with a pretty acknowledgment of his salutation.

"Ah, can one ever forget certain things! The man who has stared the sun he sees a luminous spot dance before his eyes."

"But you didn't stare at me so much as that, I'm sure. I think I will take your arm to go back to the drawing-room."

Mr. Dexter left them on this word, but the Prince stirred much bad blood among the detrimentals by remaining with Grace till the time of her departure. When Lady Pennywoddle's carriage was called, it was the Prince who escorted Grace to the cloak-room, wrapped her in her cloak and conducted her out. On the pavement he shook hands with flattered Sir Ham, and craved permission to call on him.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAND KISSING AND STRATEGY.

The next day Mayrose went down to Windsor with Sir Tito Tumb, Lord Tweedledee, Lord Beaujolais, and Mr. Paramount, and kissed hands on appointment. They travelled from Paddington in a special train, and were received at the Windsor station by a couple of the claret-coloured Royal landaus, which conveyed them up Castle Hill, past St. George's Chapel and the residence of the military knights, and so to the grand quadrangle behind the Round Tower. They were not in uniform, but in evening dress, with black breeches and stockings, Lords Tweedledee and Beaujolais wearing their ribands of the Thistle and St. Patrick respectively. Her Majesty gave them audience in the Council Chamber, having with her a Master of the Ceremonies, an Equerry, her Private Secretary, and a Clerk of the Council, who took minutes of all the proceedings. The out-going Ministers had been honoured with an audience an hour before, and had surrendered their seals, which lay on the table contained in flat red morocco boxes; the in-comers now advanced one by one, took the oaths of fealty, and dropped on one knee, kissing the air one-tenth of an inch above Her Majesty's hand. It was pleasant enough to watch the undisturbed look which the Queen wore at this hour of a political fix which would have kept any foreign Court in a state of wild agitation, and given rise to backstairs intrigues without number. Accustomed to see her faithful Ministers pelt each other with fragments of the Constitution, and take the name of the People in vain, she could afford to evince on this as on many a past occasion that demure composure which has made of her the wisest Sovereign who ever sat on the English throne. It is, indeed, no small proof of wit and wisdom for an experienced lady, who can see clearly through the motives of her precious advisers, to abstain from all interference with their freaks; only when Mr. Paramount or Mr. Paradyse has been explaining to Her Majesty how some new reform is absolutely necessary to promote the welfare of this realm by keeping themselves in office, the Queen probably consoles herself by laughing in private. Nor is there any reason why she should not laugh, for when Paramountists and Paradyseists have laid low all those institutions which gave us a distinctive character among nations, then it may occur to some that the amiable Whigs—who stripped the Crown of all its controlling power, and handed over the Government to be snarled for between a few dozen of greedy and unscrupulous politicians—were less astute in their generation than has been supposed; and on that day the sceptre may be used once more for the common good to keep Ministers within the proper functions which their title implies—as servants of the Crown, not its masters.

The hand-kissing being over, the new officials were admitted to the honour of

lunching with Her Majesty—a rather gloomy ceremony ; for, as etiquette forbids any of the guests to speak unless addressed, they sat there in moody silence, as if they were all sulk. The Queen, however, exchanged a gracious remark with each in turn—chiefly about those burning topics, Swiss scenery, and water-color painting ; and at the moment of leave-taking she took occasion to congratulate Mayrose on his marriage, alluding kindly to Mary's presentation on the day previous, and hoping she would soon become better acquainted with her. The party were driven back to the station between two rows of a Windsor mob, of whom some yelled, though the majority huzzaed and seemed disposed to wink at Mr. Paramount ; and on the station platform an enthusiastic crowd of Eton boys were assembled and set up a piercing cheer as the Ministers entered the train. These Etonians had come mainly to cheer Mayrose. He had not left Eton more than nine years, and there was still one boy in the school who had been in the lowest division, and at the same tutor's, when he went away, and who had now climbed to the sixth form. This young gentleman, very dignified in his white necktie, lifted his hat and started the cheer ; and Lord Tweedledee, who had been at Eton too—as which of them has not ?—affably took all the homage to himself and bowed his acknowledgments out of the window. He was a veteran statesman, this Lord Tweedledee, who had frequently held office before, and had now been invited to hold it again, because it was feared he intended to make himself disagreeable, having expressed grave doubts as to whether he would follow Mr. Paramount in his "reckless adventure." All his doubts were allayed now that he was going to have £5,000 a year.

On the night following this, Mr. Paradyse's Home Rule motion was introduced into the House of Commons. At the eleventh hour it was decided among the party whips that for strategical reasons they would only take the sense of the House on the question of granting Home Rule to the Isle of Wight ; which, being the smallest of the malcontent districts, naturally made most noise. Indeed, the one member for Cowes was as good as a big party by himself, so indefatigable was he in obstructing business. He was continually "spying" strangers in the House. Backed by relays of Irishmen and by the members for Margate and Ramsgate, who had commenced a Home Rule agitation for the Isle of Thanet, he lodged wayward motions, and divided the House on them. When Bills of public utility were being debated he rendered all progress impossible by moving first the adjournment of the debate, then the adjournment of the House ; and when beaten in these motions, his friends took them up again by pairs, going at it hammer and tongs one after another till the Commons would slink off to bed in disgust. In fact, the member for Cowes was a striking pattern of what a politician should be who wants something that nobody else wants, and knows he shall get it by shouting.

Mr. Paradyse therefore solemnly moved that England should go out of its way to please this honourable gentleman ; but Mr. Paramount, having also reconsidered his tactics, met the motion by a single negative, without intruding the question of Universal Suffrage. He required time to marshal his forces for the suffrage tussle, but reckoned, meanwhile, that he had majority enough to repel Home Rule if he confined the battle to that sole issue, and he was right, for Mr. Paradyse was defeated by some twenty votes. Before the debate Lord Albert Drone and Mr. Sterling had both risen below the gangway to give a feeling statement of their reasons for leaving the Ministry, and they had been loudly cheered by Lord Hornette and some fifty other "true-blues," as well as by the other lung-power of Mr. Paradyse's party. After the division, Mr. Paramount stood up, amidst a dead hush, and asked leave to bring in the Universal Suffrage Bill, and leave having been given, the House proceeded to advance some Gas Bills one stage, knowing that the great engagement would be postponed until the Suffrage Bill was read for the second time. Now from this date the *Reporter* increased the size of its pages, and devoted three columns a day to politics in Mr. Paramount's interest. For the first time in British history parliamentary reports were printed, not according to the courteous formulæ of dulness, but humorously and graphically as is the Parisian custom. Thus if an honourable member wore an absurd coat, or stuttered, and emptied the House by his dreary utterances, these circumstances were made care-

ful note of ; and the consequence was that some gnashing of teeth ensued. The hon. gentlemen quizzed, attributing their discomfiture to Mayrose, whom they knew to be connected with the *Reporter*, set him down for one of the most unblushing partizans that ever plied a cudgel over the heads of a patriotic Opposition.

But whilst England was thus revelling in the throes of political entanglement, that happy Republic of Rio-Brigande, which had long been enjoying those democratic institutions which the thoughtful men of our own isles were coveting—Rio-Brigande was about to see another revolution. Senor Descamisado had landed on his native shores, and forthwith telegraphed to Prince Casino that he saw his way to upsetting the Government, and wanted the preliminaries of the loan settled, so that the money might be forthcoming as soon as possible after his *coup d'etat*. Accordingly, Prince Casino set out for the city to see Sir Ham Pennywoddle. He, too, was a strategist of the Paramount order, and had sagacity enough to perceive that the first proposals of the loan should not come to the Knight through a lady, lest the cautious financier should sniff that circumvention was being attempted. He would begin by laying his request frankly before Sir Ham, and would hear a multitude of objections amounting to a polite refusal ; then he would ingratiate himself with Miss Marvell, and, through her, work daily and hourly on the Knight till the latter grew to think well of Rio-Brigande, then to descry profit in the opportunity of assisting it, and finally to regret having refused the loan ; at which stage he would probably come and renew the negotiations of his own accord. Financial projects are generally based on straightforward calculations of this sort ; and Prince Casino was only acting as the best of the city folk, among whom his blue brougham was trundling, act every day in the matter of tens, hundreds, or thousands, according to their powers. Revolving his plans methodically in the light brain that lay under his curly oiled hair, the Italian shot up Ludgate Hill at the busiest part of the day, reached Cornhill, and descended outside the offices of the Oyster-shell Utilisation Company, limited. They were gorgeous offices, occupying a whole palace with polished granite columns, and, as is usual with palaces in our country, this one was located in a dark street, between a pot-house and a mouldy brick building three stories high.

The Prince was not to wait long in any ante-chamber. He was shown almost at once up a broad staircase with corrugated columns, and into the imposing chairman's room, where Sir Ham had just been tackling a steak and a pint of Bordeaux, it being refreshment hour. The good Knight felt hugely honoured by the Prince's visit ; and whilst a footman in a grey coat with silver buttons carried out the tray where the steak had been, he wheeled a capacious arm-chair near his desk, and asked whether a glass of port or sherry would be acceptable. But the Prince disliked these fiery drinks, and indeed all drinks but coffee or water when not obliged to swallow them to keep others in countenance, so he came at once and in the most smiling way possible to business.

But hereon he saw the Knight promptly close up like one of the oysters out of whose outer coating this joint-stock company drew such a fine revenue. All he had heard from Mr. Dexter about Sir Ham's not being a simple man became intelligible at the sight of the financier's chubby lips suddenly puckering up at the corners, and his small eyes peering stolidly and mistrustfully at his interlocutor. Clearly this was not a man who had amassed his fortune by lending millions to other people ; it looked dubious whether he would lend sixpence. Sir Ham let the Prince run out to his full tether of explanations, and only answered when he came to a full stop. Then he replied, unenthusiastically :

"I don't deal in loans, your Highness." Sir Ham said "your Highness" because he thought every Prince was a Highness, just as every Duke was a Grace, from whatever country he came.

"No, I am aware you do not, dear Sir Ham ; but to everything there is a beginning. You are the Great Pennywoddle, whose name rings in the ears of all nations who love money—and they are numerous. The day must come when you will not be satisfied with the profits of your admirable joint stock company, but will wish to become another Rothschild—a mighty banker, a Providence to fruitful states like Rio-Brigande."

Sir Ham had never heard himself called the Great Pennywoddle by any Prince before.

"Where might this fruitful state be, your Highness?" he enquired, reddening, for his knowledge of geography was confined strictly to those coasts where oysters are to be fished.

"It is in South America, and produces the coffee which you drink, and the sugar which you put into the coffee. It might also grow the cotton gown which your housemaid wears, if generously encouraged; and ten per cent., with customs' and tobacco monopoly, are the terms which Senor Descamisado offers."

"I am sorry to say that I have a world of business on my hands, sitting in Parliament, and lookin' after my oyster-shells," said Sir Ham, groping about for some civil term of refusal.

"Ah! those oyster-shells, yes? You will be illustrious, dear Sir Pennywoddle, in connection with those shells, which you have utilised; but hark to me, for *apropos* of that I have a friend who has made the oyster his study. The pearl, you know, is a disease of the oyster, just as the wart or the boil is with you and me. Well, my friend, he says, 'Why not analyse the pearl, reduce it to liquor, and inoculate healthy oysters with it, so that they may all catch the pearl disease, then you keep the secret, sell your oyster warts tranquilly, and make millions.' That's what he says."

"God bless my soul!" wheezed Sir Ham.

"Yes; and when my friend has made his experiments—and he will succeed, for he is a great man—then we will come to you for capital, and establish a partnership that will make you the richest financier in the world. But for the present, what do you say to the loan?"

"I'll make enquiries, your Highness, just to see," stuttered Sir Ham, slipping back into prudence, for his eyes had kindled at the pearl idea, which he thought eminently feasible.

"Well, I will give you time to think; for the circumspection of the British financier is what all the universe admires," said the Prince, rising and stretching out a hand covered with flesh-coloured kid.

"I—I hope your Highness won't be offended if this 'ere loan comes to nought," observed Sir Ham, pressing the hand reverently. He had it on his lips to ask more particulars about the inoculation of healthy oysters, but feared to take the liberty.

"Offended, dear Sir Pennywoddle! how can you talk so?" laughed the Prince, with supreme courtesy. "I proposed to myself to go this afternoon and visit the amiable Milady Pennywoddle and your charming Meess Marvell. Pray—do not accompany me to the door—I beg of you——"

But Sir Ham did accompany him right down into the street, saw him into the brougham, and "Your Highnessed" him so that the footman in the grey coat might hear. He was evidently much prepossessed in the Prince's favour, however dubious he might be of Rio-Brigande. So the Italian had compassed all that, for the present, he desired. He drove to the Brummel and lunched with a pair of non-political Peers; then set out for Kensington. Now, as he was rolling on his way towards Grace Marvell, that young lady was sitting in conversation with her rejected but not yet disheartened suitor, Quilpin Leech.

CHAPTER IX.

GRACE MARVELL'S SUITORS.

Mr. Leech stood beside Grace Marvell, who was in Sir Ham's drawing-room, putting roses and white pinks into a table-vase. He handed up the flowers to her one by one as they were required, and when the stalks were too long, obediently cut them at her bidding with a pair of small scissors, gold-handled. Doing all this, he murmured ruefully.

"I wish you could be persuaded to listen to me, Miss Marvell."

"I am listening to you, Mr. Leech."

"But not in the way I mean. I tell you that my salary is increased, because Lord Mayrose has been promoted, and also that a good permanent appointment has been promised me as soon as I like to have it, and you seem indifferent."

"I am very glad for your sake. If I were Lord Mayrose I would give you the best appointment at my disposal."

"I don't want any appointment unless it helps me to win you. I have money enough as it is; and do you know it seems to me that a thousand a year would not be so very little for us to begin with."

"Anything less than ten thousand a year is poverty in England. But if you had twice that I would not marry you, Mr. Leech, because I like you too well. Give me some of those leaves, please."

He cast a glance of reproach at her, and she gaily laughed at him, holding out her hand for the leaves. More than a year and a half had elapsed since he had first sought her hand, but her refusal had not disheartened him, and he had frequently come back to his wooing with hints and sighs. At balls, parties, the opera, and at all such daytime exhibitions as he found leisure to attend, he was continually in her train; and seeing that he was not a man to be shaken off, she had grown to utilise him, good-naturedly, for purposes of shopping or errand-running. He was, moreover, of help to her in looking after the comforts of her father, who had been placed at Sir Ham's expense in a private asylum. Quilpin Leech had objected to the old man's confinement, but the thing had become inevitable owing to Mr. Marvell having talked of pistols as the possibly final remedy for his "grievance." He was shut up a couple of days after he had declared that since laws and Ministers were not strong enough to get the better of Mr. Keane-Midge, a bullet fired publicly in Whitehall might arrange the matter; and Quilpin Leech was now in the habit of visiting him once a week, with supplies of fruit, books, and cigars.

Therefore he was a serviceable ally to Grace; but yet she laughed at him, and he could not help thinking her cruelly beautiful in her mockery. She was dressed in a light summer gown, of some buff hue, with velvet bracelets on her wrists; a velvet band with a large gold medallion round her throat, and a pearl in each of her ears. A June breeze, which came through the window heavily laden with the scent of mignonette from the balcony, faintly stirred a lock of her chestnut hair; and her lithe hands bent the stalks of the flowers with a delicate tenderness, as if they were living things which she loved.

"Yes," she repeated, merrily, "I like you too well to encumber you with such a troublesome present as myself."

"What derision that is!" he murmured. "Do you mean to say you would never marry a man whom you loved?"

"I did not say loved," replied she, in a lower tone. "I meant that I was too much your friend to wish to make you unhappy. Were you ever so rich, I should be teasing you to do things not to your taste. I might try to render you ambitious; and, as you are not a weak man, you would only humour me up to a certain point; then we should quarrel."

"We should never quarrel, for I'd be as ambitious as you pleased."

"But not in the way I pleased—I think I want a rose here—You see a man can't alter his nature, and I will only marry a person who can obey me blindly, or who can make me blindly obey him. You are too intelligent and good for either of those parts."

"I never heard anybody speak so coldbloodedly as you do."

"Well, if every girl talked with the same frankness, a great many wretched marriages would be prevented. But now this is enough on that subject. I suppose you think, Mr. Leech, that a lady's 'No' is never irrevocable; but it is in this case. So I want you to dismiss all ideas of my ever being your wife, and never—never to allude to such a thing. If you desire us to live on good terms, you must be content with such friendship as I offer, and do everything I tell you."

"You know I would jump off the roof of a house if you ordered me."

"Can you imagine me ordering you to jump off the roof of a house?" she laughed. "Try to be cheerful and friendly, that is all I ask. You are lively enough with others, it seems, for I hear of you playing practical jokes with the

clerks in your office. There was a poor copyist whom you told to write that an eclipse of the sun was going to be put off because of the Queen's birthday."

"A man must do something to relieve his misery," replied Quilpin Leech, crumpling a rose, with dismal philosophy.

"Yes, but you ought not to be miserable. And then I must ask you not to scowl at everybody who comes near me, as if you had a right to interfere with my actions. At Lady Mayrose's party the other night you were quite rude to a gentleman who was introduced to me——"

"An Italian, with a head like a puppy's, by Jove!" moaned Quilpin Leech, in disgust. "The fellow hadn't been near you five minutes before he began whispering in your ear."

It was at this moment that the Italian with a head like a puppy drove up to Sir Ham's door, and his card, brought in to Grace, evoked an audible "Talk of the devil!" from the wretched clerk. "I am not going to stay here and see that man simper foreign compliments to you," added he, catching up his hat and faithful death's-head umbrella; and so went, crossing the Italian, who danced over the threshold with smiles quite un-English and tongue all awag.

"I am sorry to say Lady Pennywoddle has been unwell this morning," said Grace, replying to the Italian's glib enquiry about Milady: "but she would certainly not miss the pleasure of seeing you." And she ordered the servant to apprise her ladyship of the Prince's visit.

"*Mon Dieu*, Miss Marvell, I would not disturb Milady," said Prince Casino, settling down into a frail French lounging chair, and ogling Grace, who seated herself opposite him on the other side of the chimney-piece. "Do you know I have thought about you without cease ever since that happy evening when I talked with you half an hour."

"You must have very little to occupy you, then," answered she, with a slight blush. "But here comes Lady Pennywoddle."

Lady Pennywoddle, in effect, flowed in and the Prince rose to salute her.

"It is with the profoundest grief I have just heard that your ladyship was indisposed," he said, with a charming curvet.

"I am much obliged to your Royal Highness," panted the good lady. "It's these 'ere summer heats, sir, that never agreed wi' me. I ain't no longer young, like my dear Grace here."

"Miss Marvell is as one of the flowers gathered from that delicious bouquet on your table. The rose and she are sisters," smiled the Prince.

"Sir Ham will be very sorry he was not at home when you called," remarked the young lady complimented.

"No, Miss Marvell, he will not have sorrow, for I saw him this morning. I went down to your remarkable city to seek him on business." And sinking into the easiest and most graceful of postures in his lounging chair, the Prince proceeded to recount what his business had been.

It was like listening to a chapter of some perfectly-written novel. Accustomed to the reserve of English visitors, who are a shy race, prone to weather comments and feeble remarks about new books or operas, Lady Pennywoddle and Grace could not but be subjugated by the facile talk of a man who had no more shyness in him than a barrel-organ. He set himself to kindle their interest in the Republic of Rio-Brigande, and began, like a true artist, by painting it in its showiest colours—displaying it such as it might be, but had never been. He talked of its glorious climate; its noble forests, filled with birds of varied plumage, blue, orange, and scarlet; its majestic rivers, over whose limpid waters the fairy sunsets cast huge sheets of crimson glow, like fire. Then the *haciendus*, with their gay verandahs and surrounding plantations of fragrant coffee and waving sugar-canes; the courtly planters, with rifles at their backs, wearing cashmere cloaks and snowy *panamas*, and bestriding glossy steeds fleet as the wind. Then again the smiling cities with their houses of marble; their *loggie*, with awnings of pink and white; their *patios*, where cool fountains flash all day in basins of porphyry. Rio-Brigande was an earthly paradise thus limned; and when it was evident to the narrator that he had

brought the ladies to this opinion of it, he performed the operation familiar in dissolving views of casting a sudden blackness of storm over the landscape.

He pictured this garden of Eden laid waste by the troubles of its fifty-one revolutions and its three repudiations of national debt. The marble houses had bullet marks on their facades; the planters used their rifles to slay each other, instead of those birds with the blue and orange plumage; the plantations yielded no sugar, and coffee was dearer there than here. All this was like the land of Moab after the deluge. But, lo! a great man with a religious soul and a patriotic heart had arisen—Descamisado, who meant to quell the voice of faction, stay the bullets, set the fountains plashing again in the *patios*, and scatter plenty once more over the land of milk and honey. Here a sketch of Descamisado (in the flesh he was five foot high, and had a face like a sour monkey's)—a dreamy, inspired young man, with soft eyes that glared indignation on the wicked and inexpressible tenderness on women and children, and on all the weak. Descamisado was the idol of his mother. He read his Bible; his moustaches were black, and his hands small and white; he could snap a bar of iron over his knee; he despised gold, but he wanted five millions to lead back his misguided countrymen into the paths of peace and sugar-making. At this stage it was evident that if the ladies had had five millions in their purses they would have subscribed them instantly for the regeneration of Rio-Brigande, and, further, they were evidently persuaded that the man who having five millions should decline contributing them to an object so pious was quite blind to the true uses of money. Then Prince Casino remarked, sweetly, that Sir Ham Pennywoddle was the man.

"You do not mean to say that Sir Ham has refused to help Senor Des—Descamisado?" inquired Grace, with an animated flush on each of her cheeks.

"Yes, and he is quite right," answered the Prince, with angelic indulgence. "This is an affair for an ambitious man to undertake. The loan would make him almost master of the Rio-Brigande. It would put the customs in his hands, and the tobacco monopoly, and also yield him millions. Out there, such a power would make him half a god; here in England, so much influence over a foreign State would cause him to be created a Peer. But Sir Ham he is not an ambitious man; he is content with the honourable position he now has; and, *mon Dieu*, he is wise!"

Grace bit her lips. "Perhaps Sir Ham declined on account of the risks. Not being a banker, he may be unused to loans."

"*Dio bono!* but there are no risks, Signorina. Everything is guaranteed; and then Monsieur Pennywoddle need not hazard one sixpence of his own money. He floats the loan, and the public they fight at the door to buy scrip; then the shares they go up to a premium, and Sir Ham pockets the profit. That is how it is done."

"Deary me, your Royal Higness, Sir Ham ain't never been accustomed to those great things," sighed Lady Pennywoddle, not without regret, for the story of Senor Descamisado who read his Bible and was a pride to his mother, had touched tender strings in her heart. "Show my Ham the way to do a good turn to a soul without losing anything, sir, and I think he'll be willin', for I know 'im."

"The Chevalier Ham is a pearl among men, Milady," replied the Italian, enthusiastically; "and that is why I went to him in preference to others. I said to myself '*E Dio!* who is worthier to regenerate a fallen country than a man who, by labour and honesty, has brought himself so high?' But Sir Ham has a soul above ambition, Heaven be praised! And so I must go to others, for there are plenty in the city who will sink to the floor on their knees, crying, 'Give me this loan!'"

"Oh, but Sir Ham cannot let such an opportunity pass by," ejaculated Grace, in agitation. "The chance of acquiring"—she checked herself, and added—"the chance of doing so much good and of benefiting a beautiful country ought to move any man."

"Ah! thank you for that word," exclaimed the Italian, standing up, and extending one of his gloved hands. "Dear young lady, if you had lived in my country in the time of her enslavement, the people would have gathered round you to ask you to sing them the Marseillaise. You remind me of La Belle Paule, who was so lovely that the people of Toulouse obliged her husband to lead her out for a walk

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two hours in each week, in order that the populations might rejoice in her beauty. But see! you have roses on that table. Give me one that I may despatch it to Descamisado, and say that the fairest of England's daughters sent it him with her wish of God-speed. It will nerve him more than money!"

He stood holding out his hand, and such is the facility with which these Southerners play a part when they throw their hearts into it, that he called up a pair of ready tears into his eyes. Much stirred by this scene of romance—so new, so congenial to her spirit—Grace reddened, caught up a rose and gave it to the Prince. He stuck it with a proud look in his button-hole, raised the giver's trembling fingers to his lips; then made a low bow to wondering Lady Pennywoddle, and vanished—satisfied, may be, that he had well employed his afternoon.

CHAPTER X.

SIR HAM BAITED.

Grace went to the window and watched the Prince's retreating brougham till it became a speck. He had said very little to her, but his eyes had been eloquent, and the concluding incident of the rose had filled her with a sensation which no man before had ever instilled into her breast. "It is probably his manner with all girls," she reflected, remembering how every one of his phrases had been accentuated with an appealing glance from his dark eyes, but she could not suppose that his dark eyes glistened with tears in speaking to every girl, nor that he compared them all to La Belle Paule. This brought her to think of his being a Prince, and she presumed that he must be rich, for she too had her illusions about Princes. His dress and manner, the appointments of his brougham, his mode of living and enjoying himself, gave him an air of being wondrous wealthy, and here she was led to the idea of that large loan for Rio-Brigande. She retired from the window, brooding over Sir Ham's refusal to take any part in this State transaction, and conning over the things which she meant to say about it. For certainly she had no intention of letting the matter rest here.

When at his interview with Mr. Dexter, Prince Casino had jumped to the conclusion that Grace Marvell had formed her plans for succeeding Lady Pennywoddle, he had supposed her to be more designing than she actually was. Lady Pennywoddle's health was not such as would warrant any calculations as to the period of her demise; and Grace had no tragical purpose of hastening her exit from this life. But there was no doubt that in course of a year Grace had acquired a complete ascendancy over the Pennywoddle couple, and more particularly over Sir Ham, whose sentiments towards her, at first fatherly, had gradually ripened into something else, both indefinable and curious. He did nothing without consulting her. He hungered for her praise like a carp for bread-crumbs. He had changed his nature under her influence, and had grown to think himself young again. Kindness, a never wearied attention to his wants, words and smiles always ready to stimulate his vanity, and to reward him for displaying it, these were the arts which she had used to secure the mastery which her beauty had given her; and it was positive that if ever she encouraged Sir Ham to analyse his sentiments he would declare that what he felt for her was love, and would throw himself at her feet with half his fortune, after the wont of enamoured old men. She never encouraged him, but was satisfied with the consciousness of a power which she could use to obtain from him any pecuniary assistance she pleased on the day when it should suit her purpose. Meanwhile, ostensibly but a companion to Lady Pennywoddle, she really ruled the Knight's household, excepting, of course, in the kitchen regions, which were still her ladyship's favorite groves. She ordered everything, saw to everything, and Sir Ham accounted her as a daughter, keeping her bountifully supplied with costly dresses and trinkets, besides giving her generous sums of pocket-money under pretence of paying her the interest of a small amount which had been raised by selling Mr. Marvell's *bric-a-brac* after his removal to the lunatic asylum. Sir Ham alleged that he had invested this trifle in oyster-

shell shares, and that it bore fruit a hundredfold. There is a great deal of delicate chivalry in the behaviour of amorous city men.

So, driving with Lady Pennywoddle in the park that afternoon, Grace meditated how she could exert her power over Sir Ham to waken his interest in Rio-Brigande; and when the Knight returned home shortly before dinner, she had collected a fine quiverful of arguments to conquer him. Gratitude towards Prince Casino swayed her somewhat in this matter, for the Italian was the first man of distinguished rank who had joined her court of detrimentials, and she burned to show him what skill she could evince in high negotiations. Furthermore, accepting the Prince's phantasmagoric account of Rio-Brigande as being all true, she verily believed that this opportunity was one which Sir Ham ought not to throw away. Why should she, of all women, have mistrusted the recuperative genius of Senor Descamisado, whose ambition to domineer over his fellows realised her ideal of what every spirited man's passion should be?

"Well, did yer have a pleasant drive, my dear?" inquired Sir Ham, during the quarter of an hour in which they were alone before dinner. Grace was going to the opera with Lady Pennywoddle in the evening, but she had contrived to be home early and to finish her dressing soon, so that she might have an interview with the Knight.

"Yes, thank you," she said, taking her seat on a sofa, which her brilliant skirt almost covered in its length and breadth. "We saw Mary with Lady Beaujolais in her carriage. They seemed to be the best of friends, and everybody was bowing to them as two mighty people."

Sir Ham coughed. He had deferred telling Grace of his failure to obtain Cabinet office or Peerage for himself; he had even feigned that the Prime Minister was "thinkin' over" the matter. The allusion to Mary's mightiness suggested to him that now was perhaps the time to avow that the "thinking" had come to nothing, and so get a weight off his mind.

"My dear, I'm afraid it won't do to set your mind on my being a Minister or a lord," he began timidly. "Mayrose tells me there's objections to it."

"I wonder Lord Mayrose should say that," she answered gently. "What objections can there be to your holding any post which is within his reach? He owes something to his birth, a great deal to his wife's money; you owe everything to your talents. I suppose it is my being a woman which makes me think you the greater man of the two."

"Well, my dear, but he's a smart chap," rejoined the Knight, flattered, nevertheless, as he always was by such homage. "He has a power o' learning' and pluck in him."

"But so have you plenty of courage, it seems to me; and if it is influence that fails you, why not acquire influence? Prince Casino called this afternoon and talked to us of a loan that might be very profitable to you—and for a lovely country too."

"Ay, my dear, for a country where Providence has given 'em everything except the ability to govern themselves and pay their debts," answered Sir Ham, with a flash of City shrewdness: "but I'm glad the Prince called, for he's a perlitte young man."

"And I'm sure it would have interested you to hear him tell us about that unhappy country which is perishing for want of a little money," rejoined Grace. "His whole soul appeared to be in it. Such glowing descriptions, such contrasts of beauty and misery you never heard; and then the Senor Descamisado is evidently a great and noble man."

"A furrineer, whose name ain't ever been quoted in the city, my dear, responded the Knight, suspiciously. "You see all that one can tell of furrineers is that often they're apt to come up and go like mushrooms, leaving a lot of bills unpaid."

"Do mushrooms leave their bills unpaid?" she laughed. "Of course, you know better than I: but Prince Casino says this loan would give you immense influence in Europe. He hinted at stars and titles, and I inferred that you would

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have no risk to run, for you would only—'float the loan' I think was his term, and the public would quickly buy the scrip.

"But they mightn't buy it, and where should I be then? I questioned a few long-headed friends o' mine after I'd seen the Prince, and they advised me to have nothing to do with a country which has borrowed three loans already and never paid one. That's what they said, my dear."

"Oh, if you are going to be deterred by every counsellor who tries to frighten you, I have nothing more to say," answered Grace, with one of the arch smiles and pretty looks with which she could have driven Sir Ham straight to the cannon's mouth. "As to those gentlemen in the city," added she, with quiet irony, "I believe a great many of them are jealous. They would like to get the loan themselves. Depend on it that is their object, Sir Ham."

"But, Grace, I ain't ever mixed in loans," protested the Knight, wretchedly, like one who feels ground slipping under him; "I ain't a banker, either, and I'm old to begin such work."

"You look younger and younger every day," she answered, surveying him as if with affectionate admiration.

"Well, my dear, I'll go and see some of the regular bankers to-morrow," he replied, glancing with satisfaction at his dyed poll and diminishing waist in the glass. "Maybe, Geltrubber will be able to tell me summut more about Rio-Brigande. But now, 'ere's dinner."

Dinner was announced, but if Sir Ham thought that he should be able to escape from Rio-Brigande under cover of it, he was mistaken. From soup to dessert Grace harped skilfully on that theme, and this time she had an ally in Lady Pennywoddle, whose regard for the religious young Mr. Descamisado, who read his Bible, cast a halo of purity over the whole land which her husband eyed so askance. Sir Ham, perceiving that he was somehow ensnared into doing a thing against which his whole commercial sense rebelled, lost much of his appetite, and began to defend himself like a man frightened. He explained what was the value of five millions—namely, £250,000 a year at five per cent., he conjured up all the perils of loans, the miseries of unbought scrip, unpaid coupons, solemn votes of repudiation, and he ended by throwing himself into a serious panic by the last picture which his fancy aroused of himself passing an examination before the Chief Bankruptcy Judge in Basinghall street. But what could all this avail against the incredulous rejoinders and the light raillery of Grace? Lady Pennywoddle early deserted the Rio-Brigande camp, feeling that no Republic or biblical young man in the world ought to make her Ham lose his appetite for his salmon; but Grace remained staunch. At dessert, when the servants were out of the room, and Sir Ham was partially silenced by reason of strawberries in his mouth, she recapitulated all the arguments he had used, and smilingly demolished them as tokens of pusillanimity. Never had Sir Ham known her more full of banter, and never had her bewitching face seemed more affectionately to upbraid him for not being equal to the high estimate she had formed of his valour. In the end the Knight did as better men have done before or since when subjected to a too hot fire, and capitulated. He repeated his promise that he would consult the banker Geltrubber on the morrow, and that if the thing seemed morally feasible he would do it. "But you wouldn't have me act rashly and be ruined, Grace, my dear?"

"No, indeed," and in this she was sincere, for she had no wish to see him ruined; "but I hope it will be a means of doubling your fortune instead of making you lose anything."

"Well, the Lord hear you, my dear," said the Knight piously, and for a third or fourth time he renewed his promise, as he helped Grace to put on her opera cloak, and handed her and his wife into the carriage for Covent Garden.

Then he returned with waddling steps into the house, took a new survey of himself in the glass, to see whether artificial methods were truly obliterating in him the marks of time, and ejaculated, under his breath, "She's a bootiful girl, and would make me go through a needle's eye, dang me! Why shouldn't I take to this loan if it pleases her? It might do me good, as she says. Anyhow, when I've

seen Geltrubber, I'll sound Mayrose about it. He'll know more of furrin' parts now than all of 'em."

After which Sir Ham locked the door, removed his dresscoat and waistcoat, loosened his cravat, and for the space of five minutes began to spar with exceeding pugnacity against the other Pennywoddle in the mirror. This was one of the delightful evening pastimes recommended to him in his pamphlet on fatness.

CHAPTER XI.

SIR HAM IN THE TOILS.

Prince Casino had the sense to keep out of Grace Marvell's way, both that evening at the Opera, where she perceived him in the stalls from her box, and for several days afterwards, in order to prove that he was nowise anxious about the loan. In the meantime Grace wrought upon Sir Ham, with a woman's patient wit and cajolery, day by day, till all the steady principles of business which had made of him a successful man grew addled in his pate. The bankers to whom he applied gave him the poorest account of the Rio-Brigande, and the great Baron Guldenstock especially, who was always civil to city men connected with Peers and Ministers, went obligingly into figures, and demonstrated that Rio-Brigande might be expected to pay its debts on the day when thistle plants bore pine-apples—a miracle of which there was no sign just then. And yet Grace persuaded Sir Ham that all these bankers—that Baron Guldenstock, whose name was as Urim and Thummim in Lombard-street—were merely putting him out of conceit with the loan for the purpose of getting it into their own hands. The truth is, when he found her standing of a morning in her fresh corn-linen dress, and and making his tea for him at the breakfast table, he would have believed any monstrous thing she chose to aver. They generally breakfasted alone together, for Lady Pennywoddle had of late fallen into the habit of taking her tea in her own room; and Sir Ham, as he nibbled his rusks and stirred his beverage, which had no cream or sugar in it, was all at the mercy of the girl who could make him glow from head to foot with a smile, or plunge him into depths of misery by a pout. He would tell her what business he had transacted the day before and what he intended to do that day, and it was then that her artifices were plied to make light of Baron Guldenstock and sport of all the other bankers. At half-past nine she brought Sir Ham his hat, gloves, and umbrella; and he would kiss her before starting for the City. He had first begun to kiss her when she had come into his house as his daughter's friend—a morning and evening kiss being given to her then because they were given to Mary, and because it was kindly wished to make the motherless girl feel that she had a home. But they were not such innocent kisses now. Every time the poor Knight's lips touched Grace's damask cheek his blood tingled in his veins; and he would go his way, blessing himself that those rusks were making him thinner, and with his brain all seething under his crop of muddy-coloured hair, the effect of dye.

So hour by hour passed in excited thoughts, rendered still more wild by the political agitation, which was filling London with hot air, and causing even more prudent men than Sir Ham to lose some of their business coolness. But after a few days, just when Sir Ham had heard so much against Rio-Brigande that he was getting to disbelieve the whole of it, Grace began to grow uneasy at hearing nothing more from the Prince. She repeatedly saw him at the Opera and other places, but always at a distance; and he was invariably disporting himself amidst a circle of fine ladies, who appeared to make a choice pet of him. Grace became aware of a pang at the heart which smote her whenever she saw him thus enjoying himself in women's society. It could not be love; she would not have owned to such a sentiment for a person of whom she had seen so little—she whose heart had never yet warmed to any man. And yet he was very handsome, with his bright foreign face; and there was a great magic in his novel, unembarrassed manner, and yet greater magic in his high-sounding title. She asked herself with bitterness whether he could be like the countless other distinguished persons who had given a light glance and a compliment to her beauty in passing, but had sheered off on learning

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that she was the daughter of a disreputable man with a grievance. Her cheeks flamed at this fear, for several days she was tormented and restless under it, till at last further suspense became intolerable. Every other morning or so the papers had been printing telegrams from New York stating that a new revolution was expected in Rio-Brigande, where one Senor Descamisado was bestirring himself against the Government, so that she could see the Prince's predictions were about to be realised; and one afternoon coming home from the park she found that well-informed journal the *Muffin Bell*, which announced that the revolution had broken out, that Senor Descamisado had turned the Ministers out of house and home, and that Rio-Brigande was being drenched in blood. Grace had determined in the park that she must contrive a means to see the Prince, and now this piece of news suggested to her that Sir Ham might write to him at once to ask to renew negotiations about the loan. But when Sir Ham came home to dinner his features were somewhat discomposed, and he held in his hands a copy of another well-informed journal of the city, the *Capel Court Express*.

"My dear," said he, "there's summut in this paper about Rio-Brigande and the loan. See here!" And he nervously showed Grace this paragraph:—

"We are informed that Senor Descamisado, whose *coup d'etat* in Rio-Brigande we report in another column, had some weeks ago, in view of his present success, entered into negotiations for contracting a State loan in London. Senor Descamisado is said to be a man of great energy, and it is believed that his rule will inaugurate a new era in his fertile, but hitherto ill-governed, country. Negotiations for the loan are still pending, but it is rumoured that guarantees offered are sound enough to satisfy financiers, and it is possible that the loan may shortly be issued by the house of Robgroschen & Co., of Cannon-street."

"There now, I told you how it would be; you have let somebody else take your chance away!" cried Grace, throwing down the paper with trembling indignation.

"My dear, it's not sure that the chance is gone," expostulated the abashed Knight. "May be those Robgroschens won't conclude."

"Oh, nonsense, Sir Ham!" rejoined Grace, almost beside herself. "Do you think everybody hesitates as you do when an occasion of winning honour and money is offered? Prince Casino out of kindness made you a proposal for which other men would have gone down on their knees to thank him; but you were rude to him—you treated him as if he were a common impostor come to cheat you of shillings."

"My dear, I was never rude to the Prince," pleaded Sir Ham, aghast at the notion that he could have been rude to a Highness.

"Excuse me, Sir Ham, you were very rude!" said Grace, impatiently, withdrawing her silken skirts from all contact with him as she subsided on to the sofa. "You let the Prince see that you mistrusted him, and I do not wonder now that he has never been here since. Do you think that a nobleman of that rank is accustomed to see his word doubted? Why he told you certain things which you see have already come true, and it would have been more like a gentleman on your part if you had believed him."

"Come, don't say such hard things as that, Grace," groaned the Knight, sinking miserably into the chair. "You know how I've had my head racked with this business. One said one thing and one t'other; and then half the week I've had to sit as a magistrate at the Guildhall, and the other half attend to hoffice; and every evening I've been at the House o' Commons, and Dandelion axing me to see this and that city chap, to get him to vote straight, till my head spins round, it do; and I've not even had time to see Mayrose and Dexter about this loan as I wanted to."

"See Lord Mayrose and Mr. Dexter!" interrupted Grace, tossing her head with impulsive scorn. "Do you mean, then, that you are not of age, Sir Ham, to act for yourself, without taking the advice of young men. Pray, what have these gentlemen ever done for you but accept your money. Mr. Dexter obtained forty thousand pounds for you, and made his fortune; Lord Mayrose would be as insignificant now as he was last year if you had not given him half the earnings of

your life; and yet—the other day, when you begged him to use his influence to procure you some trumpery favour, he thought you not good company enough, forsooth, for the sphere to which you yourself had raised him! Ah! if you had the spirit of a man you would work for yourself now, after having so long toiled without thanks for others. You would show them whether you are a man to be made a tool of, or whether you cannot lift yourself by your merits above the heads of the proudest of them who dare now to despise you."

All these words fell like the thwacks of a whip on the tender skin of Sir Ham. Grace had never before spoken to him with such vehemence. She had discarded even the tone of deference that was due to his greater age, and could not have addressed him otherwise had she been his domineering wife. He sat rubbing his woe-begone head, but nevertheless the pain he felt was mingled with a tart sensation of pleasure, for he felt that Grace could not have exhibited such anger unless she were deeply interested in his welfare. This sensation was curiously heightened when Grace had recourse to woman's never-failing method of persuasion; and, burying her head in the beautiful bare arms that outvied the whiteness of her evening dress, began to shed tears.

He had never seen this proud girl cry. For the use she made of her eyes one might have thought that the well springs of her heart had long been dried up. The unwonted sight brought him instantly to her side, self-upbraiding and frightened.

"Grace, my dear, don't cry so. Yer'll make me lose my head if I see yer grieve about my foolishness."

"Oh, you don't care a bit for me!" she sobbed, withdrawing the hand which he tried to seize. "When others say things to you, you listen; but when I advise you, hoping to do you good, it is as if I said nothing, for I am nobody."

"Oh, Grace!" he stammered, with his face grown purple; "why, my dearie, my darling, ever since Mary was married you've bin like my daughter. I'm afeared to think how much I love you. If you wanted all I've got I'd give it you. There ain't nothing I wouldn't do to make you happy."

"Oh, I want nothing for myself," she faltered, tearfully; "only I can't bear to see others abuse your goodness, and prevent you from being great and powerful because it does not suit their designs. I want to see you filling your proper position because I can't help loving you and feeling thankful for all your kindness to me."

He would have gone down on the floor and kissed the hem of her garment for this confession. "Grace, it mayn't be too late yet," he stuttered, apoplectically, taking her now unresisting hand. "I'll write to the Prince; I'll do anything you tell me. I won't listen to any but you again; it's a promise, dearie." Thus he poured out a volley of protestations as he leaned over her still crouching figure, till at length she ceased crying.

"Yes, I am wrong to shed tears when it is time to be taking action," said she, drying her eyes and springing up; "Forgive my weakness. I think you had better write to the Prince. Perhaps, as you say, it may not be too late."

Sir Ham waddled in haste towards a writing-table. Never had he been in such alacrity to write a letter. Grace followed him and out of the last tears glistening under her eyelashes shot him an approving glance which made him fumble among the pens as if he had been blinded. "You tell me what to write, Grace," he exclaimed, hoarsely; "it shall go every word as you speak."

"I think you had better give the Prince an appointment here at luncheon time; it will be more polite than asking him to the city," murmured she, resting a hand close to Sir Ham's on the edge of the table. But then a hitch occurred which made them both laugh, for neither knew in what terms a foreign prince should be addressed: Eventually Grace's good taste settled the matter, and under her direction, the following was indited:—

"Queen's Gate, Kensington.

Sir—Could you favour me with an interview on the subject of the Rio Brigande Loan? I shall be happy to see you at my own house at 1 o'clock to-morrow, or I will call upon you by appointment.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

HAM PENNYWODDLE.

The Prince Rubino dei Casino."

Sir Ham had written the hour one o'clock in cypher. Grace took the letter, and, under pretence that a comma had been omitted, stooped, and added a 2 to the 1, unseen by Sir Ham, who was directing the envelope. She then folded the note, enclosed it in the envelope, and sealed it herself with red wax and a seal bearing Sir Ham's new coat of arms and visored helmet. The bell was rung, and a footman was despatched to take the note in the brougham to the Prince's chambers in Pall Mall. It was then a quarter to eight, and the probabilities were that the Prince would be out dining, so that no answer could be received before morning.

After this Sir Ham was allowed to have the most peaceful dinner he had known for days. Grace was so charming with him that he was loth to depart to the House of Commons, where his voice was required for the public weal; and he amazed some of his honourable friends by strutting about as buoyantly as if he had elastic soles to his boots, and by roaring interruptions at the Opposition as if he were truly bent on making a figure in politics. Grace, on her side, passed a sleepless night, but was astir betimes to instruct Lady Pennywoddle as to the luncheon that must be provided for the Prince. She then arrayed herself in an exquisitely rich and tasteful dress, and awaited his arrival alone in the drawing-room. Her object in transforming the appointment into twelve instead of one had been, of course, that the Prince might come before Sir Ham had returned from the city, whither she had made him go earlier than usual. Half an hour after his departure a note came accepting the appointment for midday; but this she suppressed, and when the Italian was announced punctually on the stroke of twelve she was enabled very prettily to feign astonishment.

"Dear me, Prince, I am afraid Sir Ham did not expect you till one!"

"Ah me! Signorina, it must have been my impatience to see you which made me misread the hour; but I wish I had come two hours before my time, for these sixty minutes will fly by on wings."

"I think Sir Ham wished to speak to you about the loan," said Grace, amiably, motioning him to a seat near her, where he sat with his face to the window, she being placed with her back to the light; "and we have to congratulate you on the success of your friend."

"Descamisado, ah! I told you truly he would hesitate at nothing. Last night came to me a happy telegram from him, saying, 'All goes well; a thousand have been shot already, and by the Virgin's help another thousand will have been got rid of before to-morrow.' Three days before I had sent him your rose, dear young lady! It is floating across the seas now with my message to him:—'Wear this next your heart, Descamisado, for it is the gift of an angel, and will be like a fortune-bearing talisman. I wish it had been offered me for myself instead of you.' That is what I wrote, Signorina, with a sigh at parting from your sweet gift."

"I am sure we all wish him success," responded Grace, trying to smile away the blush which she could not repress. "Sir Ham has grown quite enthusiastic about the beautiful country you described to us so well, and you will find him ready, I think, to undertake the loan."

He bent his dark liquid eyes on her till her own glance quailed, and a slight quiver ran over her limbs.

"Ah! Miss Marvell, it is to you we shall owe this! Sir Pennywoddle is an English business man, and who but an enchantress, a poetess like yourself, could have brought him to see that every great thought should be like the pillar of fire guiding great minds and noble-hearted people! When Rio-Brigande rises from her degradation, and when the leaves of cotton plants and coffee shrubs, stirred by the evening breezes, whisper the name of the benefactor who will have changed the country into an Eden, it will not be the name of 'Ham' they will whisper, but your

own soft, melodious name of 'Grace!' Ah, me! that I had had a helpmate like yourself to sustain me with sweet love and counsel. I should have been a great man now!"

He was leaning forward with a wonderful look of melancholy tenderness on his southern features, and this look, mingled with his words, was intoxicating to a girl who had been wooed only by the prosy vapourings of English speech. Her face burned, her bosom heaved, and it was only by an effort of control over herself that she could answer with an appearance of coaxing playfulness, and reproach the Prince for having negotiated about the loan with Herr Robgroschen. Whereat he began excuses; but here it may be as well to state at once that the Prince and Robgroschen were in a way confederates. Herr Robgroschen was one of the numerous Germans who leave their own delightful country to better themselves on the banks of the Thames, and he had cheerfully connived at the Prince's notion of printing a paragraph in the *Capel Court Express* which should puff him—Robgroschen—and at the same time excite Sir Ham into thinking that the loan would slip out of his hands if he did not use dispatch. Honest Herr Robgroschen was to play in this matter the part of the connoisseur who has much fancied a horse which a customer not being a connoisseur, has ideas of buying. He was to make difficulties about yielding up the loan. He was to declare it was the best thing he had heard of, but finally, "just to oblige Sir Ham," he was to agree to surrender the loan on being indemnified for preliminary expenses he had incurred, and receiving a small extra bonus to salve his disappointment—say £2000 in all—which he and the Italian would fraternally share between them. These little transactions are merely the hidden-springs by which all business is worked in these our times, and let none censure Prince Casino; for, as already said, he had firm faith in his friend Descamisado. He was negotiating an enterprise which he believed would bring profit to all parties and nothing was fairer than that he should use what diplomacy he pleased—within honourable limits, as above—and pick up as many trifling crumbs as fell in his way.

However, he did not explain these things to Grace, but excused himself with well acted regrets—

"Robgroschen is one of the innumerable bankers who have come to my door," said he, shrugging his shoulders. "They cry to me, 'Dear Prince!' 'Your Highness!' 'My lord!' because they smell money in the wind. Doubtless, Sir Pennywoddle had been told, 'Rio-Brigande is this, is that; but the same men who abuse it to him, declare to me, 'Rio-Brigande is the land of aloes, the cassia, let me make myself glad with its fruits!'"

"Ah, I knew there must be deceitful practices like these at work, and I warned Sir Ham of them," ejaculated Grace with animation.

"Yes, dear Miss Marvell, much deceit in your admirable city of London, proceeded the Prince, with another little shrug; "but as to Robgroschen, I will talk with him, though he is a keen man. I will say to him, 'The business is not concluded yet with you; and Sir Pennywoddle has the priority.' He will tear his hair, and will threaten me with your upright Court of Queen's Bench; but I care not. Perhaps Sir Pennywoddle will consent to give him a small sum to quiet him, and all will be well. In any case, Sir Pennywoddle is more precious to me than Robgroschen, because with Pennywoddle there is your alliance, your advice, your smiles. And, dear Signorina, you can help me—that is, Rio-Brigande—again in another important way."

"I can help you, how?" she echoed, with a flutter of satisfaction, which she concealed, however.

"Yes; you can go to Milord Mayrose, Sir Ham's son-in-law, who sits in the Cabinet, and pray him that the British Government may recognize the new Government of Rio-Brigande—or rather pray milord Mayrose's wife to act on her husband—for by all accounts, what she commands him he does." And Prince Casino went on to explain that the British Government, having long given up recognizing the different presidents and juntas who had succeeded one another in Rio-Brigande, Englishmen were deterred from settling in the country, and that if the Government would now recognize Senor Descamisado, it would greatly strengthen

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that hero's hands, and further stimulate public confidence in the Loan. He next hinted that Sir Ham ought, in the interests of the Loan, to risk some £20,000 at starting to pay for advertisements and favourable money articles in the papers. He was within an ace of letting out that £50 had been paid to the gentleman who had inserted the paragraph in the *Capel Court Express*, but checked himself in time, and observed that all journals were not as disinterested as this city paper. It would be necessary to bestow £50 here, £100 there, and so on; but if Sir Ham would give him—the Prince—a cheque for the £20,000 he would see that the money was properly distributed. Grace's lips tightened a little on hearing that she was expected to beg something of Mayrose, and a curious gleam, half triumph, half something not unlike hatred, broke into her eyes, but seeing the Prince's gaze fixed upon her for an answer she murmured assent. As to the money, she readily promised that the Prince should have whatever he desired—so readily, indeed, that she seemed to forget that her position in Sir Ham's house was supposed to be that of a dependent. Called to remembrance of the fact by an arch sparkle which she fancied—erroneously perhaps—that she saw pass through the Prince's eyes, she changed colour and faltered—

"I think I can answer for Sir Ham's readiness, for I have heard him speak so favourably of this loan before Lady Pennywoddle; and then he will of course see that it is necessary to pay for advertisements. I presume you are aware that he has a newspaper of his own?"

"Yes, that excellent *Reporter*, managed by my friend, Dexter. I will not conceal that when I first thought of appealing to Sir Ham, I was partly impelled by the thought that he had a newspaper besides gold, and was thus possessed of the two powers of the day. But other papers must be enlisted besides the *Reporter*, and money—heaven be thanked—can buy more than one of your talented English journalists. Much of my own capital will be disbursed for Descamisado's sake, and if I propose to distribute Sir Ham's £20,000, it is perhaps because I know more purchaseable persons than he does."

"I am sure you do," replied Grace, artlessly; "and Sir Ham will be much obliged to you. If you speak to him when he comes in, I daresay he will give the cheque to-day, for no time ought to be lost."

The Prince agreed that no time should be lost; and having thus to all seeming brought the key of Sir Ham's money coffers within his victorious reach, his elation got the master of him, and it was in no histrionic spirit that he stood up to grasp the hands of the lovely girl who had so bravely furthered his aims. It was perhaps fortunate that the clock was just then marking a minute to one, or else there is no guessing how far he might have pushed his demonstrations of gratitude; for with women he was never timid. As it was, he took Grace's hands before she could be aware of his intentions, and flinging himself on one knee over her footstool, said yearningly—

"In our country, beautiful Signorina, we pay debts of friendship in love's money. You have befriended Descamisado, who is my brother; let me requite you in his name," and glancing deeply and passionately into her eyes, he suddenly kissed her on the lips.

It was all so quickly done that she uttered a cry and rose, freeing herself from his embrace with a first flush of indignation. But she did not order him from the room as she would have done with an Englishman. Allowances must be made for the peculiar ways of foreigners; and Prince Casino, on raising himself from his footstool, smiled seraphically, as though quite unaware that he had taken any liberty. Besides, Sir Ham's brougham trundled up to the door, and if Grace had screamed, or scolded, or even shown that she was overmuch displeased, there must have been a scandal—and of what use would scandal have been to her?

CHAPTER XII.

"A STATE FAVOUR."

So Grace fled from the room, and left the Prince to face Sir Ham alone. But she did not remain away long, for luncheon was served, and she had no wish to be absent while the important business conference took place. Of that conference there is no need to say much. The victim Knight talked business as he ate, and was plied with champagne under pretext that it was the custom in the Prince's country to drink healths every time a dish was removed. He lost his head, and so did Lady Pennywoddle, the wife of his bosom. Every time the butler lifted the gold-capped bottles of Clicquot out of their frosted silver pails, and every time the rosy liquid fizzed up in bubbles from the bottoms of the hollow-stemmed glasses into the bowls, so every time did Sir Ham and his lady feel bubbles of glory fizz up into their own honest heads. The Knight ended by not perceiving that there were any risks in the loan at all—the public would buy up the scrip at a premium, and he should clear the profits; that is simply what the operation meant. At his third glass of wine, Sir Ham hated Robgroschen, who had come and tried to take this thing out of his reach, like a mean, skulking German, having no sort of right to live in Cannon street. At his fourth he silyly wondered whether he could not hold out for twelve per cent. instead of ten, and so squeeze out more profits from an embarrassed country, for the instincts of the British business man are irrepressible. At dessert, when he fell to on a plateful of strawberries soused in claret, he blushed at the hint that he should soon have a foreign order of knight-hood—dark blue, like the Garter—to put over his waistcoat when he dined in noble company; and he became fully prepared to grasp the necessity suggested to him for corrupting the press. Yes, Dexter should insert long advertisements and financial puffs every day; and twenty thousand pounds would not be too much to square the rest of the journals. He knew something about it, for he had paid over thirty thousand pounds to advertise the Oyster-shell Company; and he would give the Prince a cheque on the Bank of England with pleasure by-and-bye, provided it were agreed that Robgroschen should abandon his pretensions. The Prince undertook that Robgroschen should abandon everything, even though he were forced to clutch his throat and make his German teeth rattle; and he added: "For it is most evident to me, Sir Ham, that you should have this loan to yourself. Robgroschen has only brains, while you have genius. I was saying to Miss Marvell that it was an astonishment to me why Monsieur Paramount did not make you his Minister of Finance. But when they see how you manage this loan, they will come to you and say, 'Take these finance seals,' and you will become whatever you please—Peer, Lord-Lieutenant, everything great; for I added to Miss Marvell, 'Genius is like the cork, he swims ever to the surface.'" Grace reddened at this cool fiction, but Sir Ham swallowed it whole, and gasped, with the claret dribbling over his lips, "I was a fule ever to make bones about this affair. We'll arrange everything at my office to-morrow, and this very afternoon I'll go and see Jiddledubbin, and get him to make shares wi' me."

Now, Alderman Sir Joel Jiddledubbin sprang from a long line of wind-instrument makers, and was himself a Master of the Worshipful Company of Organ-builders. He was also the tried friend of Sir Ham, so that those who said, Pennywoddle, might add in the same breath, Jiddledubbin—just as those who relied on Jiddledubbin might count with equal certainty on Pennywoddle. But Jiddledubbin was corroded by the anxiety to mix with high society. He had served the office of Sheriff, and was scudding under full sail towards the Mayoralty; but he had never dined with a lord except in public; and this grieved him, for he had sons and daughters, and much money which he would have cheerfully invested in procuring coronetted husbands for his girls all round. In this respect he had been outpaced by Pennywoddle; but the two held close together, for Jiddledubbin had a great and well-founded belief in Pennywoddle's capacities, and felt honoured by his friendship. When Pennywoddle had started the Oyster-shell Company, Jiddledubbin had bought numerous shares, and accepted a seat on the Managing

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Board; and when now Sir Ham stated that he would see Jiddledubbin, it was certain that the latter would endorse a scheme which might yield him an increment of social position; so that it was exactly as if Sir Ham had said:—"The loan is concluded, and Jiddledubbin and I are the pair who will float it."

A quiet furtive smile from the Prince rewarded Grace for the sealing of the treaty, and she feigned to turn away, as if she had not forgiven the liberty which he had taken with her. But it was of no use to be prudish with this Italian, for to the rebuffs of coyness he paid no heed. Throughout luncheon he had repeatedly cast amorous glances at her, looked toastingly into her eyes while raising his glass to his lips, and indulged in such other vagaries as had obliged her in self-defence to frown and shake her head at him. But these frowns, which imply a stealthy understanding, are almost as good as smiles; and the Prince apparently thought so, for on taking leave of Grace he gave her hand a tender squeeze, so that she had absolutely no means of conveying to him that she was offended. But perhaps she was not very much offended, for the gentleman had not been gone half an hour before she put on her bonnet and ordered the carriage round, that she might go and call on Mary. She wished to see her and enlist her sympathies on behalf of the recognition of Rio-Brigande by the British Government before Sir Ham could broach that subject to Mayrose.

Mary received her with a cry of delight, for she was not suspicious. She liked Grace, and was thankful to her for living with Lady Pennywaddle and acting to her as a companion. That Grace could harbour any unscrupulous schemes for her own self-aggrandisement, or that her ascendancy over Sir Ham was getting to be of a singular kind, Mary had never perceived; for, in the first place, Grace was careful about her behaviour towards Sir Ham when Mary was present; and, in the next, Mary was so absorbed in her husband that she had eyes and ears for little else but what concerned him. Her's was one of those ivy-like natures which cling with all their strength to whatever they attach themselves—wisely, devoted natures who would be constantly flinging themselves into the fire for the man they loved, if that man would let them. When Grace came in, Mary had been seriously studying for two hours a book about etiquette and precedence—two sciences which seemed to her more obtruse than metaphysics, but which she felt it incumbent on her to master on the sly, so as never to commit any blunders which should make her husband wince. She was getting more and more conscious how defective her education had been in the social arts, and had set her ambition on reading in her husband's eyes that he was satisfied with her general deportment and language among strangers. But this ambition had not as yet been realised, for Mary's impulsive sincerity made her ignore many of those necessary restraints called white lies, and betrayed her into solecisms which moved some people to smile, and others to arch their eyebrows. Beside the book on etiquette lay a large pile of invitations, for, despite her solecisms, Mary, as a Minister's wife, was widely in request among Society. All these she brushed aside to jump and welcome Grace, when the latter was announced.

"Oh, dear Grace, how nice!" she exclaimed, standing on tip-toe to kiss friend. "I have not seen you alone for an age, but we will spend a chatty afternoon together now. I was going to the park by and bye, but I would rather stay in and talk. How's mamma?"

"Very well, dear, and sends her love."

"Poor mamma!" prattled Mary, taking off Grace's bonnet, and leading her towards a blue satin *causeuse*, comfortably contrived for two. "I thought of going to Kensington after breakfast, but I was not in bed till five o'clock this morning, and not up till eleven. That makes four days running I have seen the sun rise before being home. It's an extraordinary life."

"I hear you are seen everywhere, dear, and everywhere admired."

"Oh, admired! But it's not only the going out at nights and being home goodness knows when; it's the letters I receive. Look at all those cards! I must answer them every one. And notes from people who wish me to be patroness to this and that; and people who want money because they are wretched. And then dressmakers!—I should never have thought I could spend so much in dresses?"

"If you spent the whole mint, dear, you are pretty enough to show it off well."

"Oh, but it's sinful what I spend I assure you. When we were married Freddy said that as we should have forty thousand a year he would give me four thousand for pin-money; and I laughed, thinking no woman could ever lay out such a sum as that on herself. Well, if it wasn't that Freddy makes me so many presents I find it wouldn't be a bit too much."

"Everything worth having costs dear. That was a noble dress you were wearing the other night at the Duchess of Newmarket's."

"Wasn't it a lovely dress? And yet it's the cheapest I have. It appears to be the custom of the Silk Mercers' Company to make a present of silk every year to one of the Cabinet Ministers, and this year it was the African Secretary's turn. But the silk came on the day when Lord Stonehenge resigned, so he sent it to me, with his compliments—five-and-twenty yards of the rosiest silk you ever saw. I'm sure it's as good as any the French can make; I said so to Fred, who laughed and bought five-and-twenty yards of Lyons just like it next day, so that I might compare, as he said. Of course that was all fun, for he believes that everything English is better than what you get abroad; but then he takes every opportunity for giving me things. Last week I wanted two pear-shaped pearls with diamonds to wear as ear-rings with my grand necklace, and I sent to Malachi's, who showed me two beauties, only they were two hundred guineas each, which I thought too dear; so I told the man to take them away, lest I should be tempted. Well, I happened to mention this to Fred, and next evening at dinner I found the box with the pearls in it under my napkin." And hereat two tears sprang into Mary's eyes.

"Well, dear, you are happy, that's the great point."

"Oh, so happy!" exclaimed Mary, with a little sigh; "so happy that I am afraid sometimes it can't last; and yet," added she, vivaciously, "I have something to reassure me, for there are a pack of spiteful women in society who would like to make me miserable, and I am glad of it, or else everything would be too smooth. But I must tell you the revenge I took yesterday on one of them; it was very wicked, and I hope Freddy won't hear of it, for he would look grave, but I couldn't help it," and taking Grace's two hands Mary drew near to her and broke into a long and merry peal of laughter that filled the boudoir.

"What is it, dear? I am impatient to hear," asked Grace, laughing too.

"Oh, it is horribly ill-natured, but I'd do it again to anybody who spoke ill of my husband," pursued Mary decisively. "Well, last night we were at Lord Stonehenge's, and you know it's Freddy who has got his place, so that one might expect him to be a little sore at our not agreeing with his politics. But he is a true nobleman, and his wife is charming, and they received us with exquisite friendliness, doing their best to show us that there was no bitter feeling in them at all. However, there were a great many people at the party, and among them some of those spiteful cats who hate Freddy and me. You know it all began when Freddy tried to take up your poor papa's case; they said he wanted reforms, and that made him a great many enemies."

"Yes," said Grace, coldly.

"Well, they are vicious as hyenas. There is that over-dressed Lady Coral-mere, who, I believe, wished Freddy to fall in love with her, though her husband is alive still—the brazen-faced thing! And there is Lady Canonlaugh, who has no business to meddle with us, but does it because she is a base hypocritical creature, who likes to scratch. Now when I was passing through one of the rooms on Lord Stonehenge's arm, I saw Lady Canonlaugh stare at me through her glasses, then giggle and stop to whisper to somebody, just as if there was something ridiculous about me or my dress. You know the way women have when they want to make some one feel uncomfortable. So I knew I was reddening, and thought, 'Now, my lady, I'll just give you back your own, and some more with it, and I contrived to get a seat not far from her, where she could hear everything I said. There were soon plenty of gentlemen round me, and I fell talking to Lady Beaujolais, who brought the conversation on to a Charity for sending good books to the Siamese, and added that Lady Canonlaugh was one of the patronesses. 'Oh, then I should like to send a subscription to Lady Canonlaugh,' I said, quite loud; 'but where

shall I address it to—to Richmond?" Here Mary was seized with another fit of laughing. "You should have seen the sensation! Sir Windsor Chatt, who delights in a spiteful thing, had to turn away to conceal his laughter, and I glanced coolly towards Lady Canonlaugh, who had become yellow as a lemon, and shot me a look like an adder's sting. Soon after she got up and had her carriage called, and you may imagine what she felt all the while, for it was at Richmond that some shockingly improper thing occurred between her and an old flame of hers—Prince Casino. Lady Albert Drone had told me all about it."

"Prince Casino!" echoed Grace, giving a start, and turning pale.

"Yes; the Italian whom I saw speaking to you at our party. He is very nice, I believe; but he was never in love with her, I'll be bound, for he has too much good taste; only she threw herself at his head."

"Ah!" sighed Grace with evident relief; "I shouldn't have thought Prince Casino was a man to fancy such a person as Lady Canonlaugh; but I have come to speak to you about him, dear. He has been with Sir Ham all the morning; and, do you know, great things are going to happen. Your papa means to lend a large sum of money to regenerate Rio-Brigande, which would go altogether to ruin but for him."

"Dear Papa! he is always generous," said Mary, innocently.

"Yes; it's most generous of him, and he hopes to make a great deal by the loan. It was Prince Casino who put it in his way; and Sir Ham is very anxious that Lord Mayrose should induce the British Government to recognize Rio-Brigande in order that those poor people may have every chance of regeneration. It's a long and most touching story."

"Oh, tell me all about it!" exclaimed Mary; "but if it's going to be long we will have some tea, and I'll tell the servants that I'm not at home to anybody."

Mary rose to touch the bell, and soon the maid brought in a tray with a remarkably ugly tea-service; only the tea-pot and cups were of authentic porcelain from China, and therefore quite as valuable here as a real Staffordshire teapot might be at Nankin. Over these things and their concomitant tea-cakes the two friends lingered in confidential talk on Rio-Brigande, not for one hour but for two or three; for the subject as dilated on by Grace became quite as interesting to Mary as it had been to Grace herself when broached by the Prince. Mary never read any paper but the *Morning Post*—and the *Reporter*, of course, for the divorce cases, like every other fine lady—and she always skipped the foreign news, so that she was unaware that Rio-Brigande had been having more revolutions; indeed she was not sure that she had ever heard the name of the country before. But it took little time to awaken her liveliest sympathies on behalf of that heroic Senor Descamisado, whom she had readily accepted, as her mother had done, for a sort of religious young man intent upon making a number of foreign Fenians read their Bibles and behave themselves with propriety. She thought it quite natural that her papa should be willing to lend money to such a gentleman on good security; and nothing appeared to her easier to obtain than the recognition of the repentant Rio-Brigandians by the British Government. At least she thought this easy to obtain when she was assured that no money payments would be involved in the recognition, for she was already enough versed in politics to know that getting money out of the British Government is not easy.

But, woman-like, what she chiefly observed in the long talk about this far-off land was, that Grace frequently recurred to Prince Casino, praising his manliness, his eloquence, his noble-hearted devotion to the people's interests. Once or twice, too, Grace manœuvred so as to draw from Mary some disparaging remark about Lady Canonlaugh, with an apparent view to convincing herself that between that lady and the Prince there remained nothing resembling an attachment. Remembering the attention that the Italian had paid to Grace at her party, and hearing Grace now intoning his praises so feelingly, Mary quietly pieced this and that together while her friend spoke; and at length, when Grace had finished, Mary suddenly slipped an arm round her waist.

"Prince Casino seems to have been enthusiastic in all this affair, dear,"

she whispered archly ; " but it strikes me that his making you so thoroughly a confidant of all his intentions shows that he must be in love with you."

" Oh, Mary," said Grace, recoiling under the abruptness of the impeachment ; but the blush that mantled to her face proved to Mary that her shaft had hit straight.

" Why shouldn't he be in love with you ?" proceeded Mary, laughing. I saw how much he was struck by you, the other day ; and you must marry some one. Then he is a prince, you know, and very rich, from all I hear ; he has vineyards in Italy. And, darling, what a glorious princess you would make !"

Grace, in some confusion, suffered herself to be caressed ; but, as it was growing late, she glanced at the clock and said it was time for her to be going home. " Lady 1 ennywoddle will wonder what has become of me," she observed, rising.

" Oh, but you must wait and tell Freddy all you have been saying to me," protested Mary. " I shall never remember all that about Senor Descamisado and the tobacco monopolies. That was how you betrayed yourself, dear. No one but a girl in love could have kept so many business details in her head."

Grace, reddening again, vowed that she was not in love, and added that there was no reason why she should speak to Lord Mayrose herself. But this matter was settled by Mayrose returning before she had put on her bonnet. Mary, hearing her husband's brougham, ran down stairs to meet him, and returned in a moment with her arm linked in his.

" Freddy, here is Miss Marvell, who wishes to coax a state favour out of you," she began, introducing him, playfully. " She wants Her Majesty's Government anxiously to consider the expediency of recognizing the Republic of Rio-Brigande. I think that is how they put it officially."

Mayrose had always been on coldly respectful terms with Grace Marvell ; and she had kept on equally distant terms with him. To see them one would have thought that he disliked her, and that she had against him some secret cause for resentment. He had not been told by Mary that he was to meet Grace, and now seemed taken aback by the rencontre and by his wife's little speech.

" I saw Sir Ham not an hour ago, and he talked to me about Rio-Brigande," he said, looking hard at Grace as he shook hands with her.

" You have seen Sir Ham ; then he has told you everything about the loan, I presume ?" was her calm rejoinder, as she turned to adjust her bonnet opposite a glass.

" Yes, I met Sir Ham at the House of Commons, and he told me about a loan, for five millions which he had been induced to undertake. I confess the communication surprised me."

There was a tone of displeasure in the answer that did not escape Mary's quick ear, so she did not press Grace to remain to dinner. Mayrose gave Grace his arm to take her down to her carriage, and as he handed her in, said quietly, " May I inquire, Miss Marvel, whether you have given my wife all the details about this loan ?"

" Yes, I did so by Sir Ham's desire. I hope I have done nothing wrong."

" Oh, nothing wrong ! I merely wished to know whether those details were known to yourself. Thanks !" And as he turned back into the house a light flashed upon him.

It flashed on him that Grace Marvell must be the " parties" who had so strangely driven Sir Ham off his former sober track. Sir Ham had come to him in a lobby at Westminster, and point-blank informed him of the loan, mentioning it as a settled affair, and without taking his advice upon the prudence or advisability of it. Indeed, after hurriedly stating that he hoped the British Government would facilitate his loan by recognizing Rio-Brigande, he had shuffled off as if resolved not to hear any dissuading advice.

This was not like the Sir Ham of old times. Mayrose said nothing to Mary when he rejoined her upstairs, but while dressing he puzzled out what he should say to her at table. From what he could see of Sir Ham's strangely-altered behaviour, the Knight was being made use of by unscrupulous designers, who were pushing him into a course of foolish adventure. Hence his odd request to be made Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that other demand—quite as odd for the man who had

no son—to be created a peer. In all this, Mayrose's position was delicate ; for he had received some £500,000 from Sir Ham as Mary's marriage portion, and had no claim whatever on the rest of his father-in-laws's estate, although he had been given to understand that Mary would inherit it. He shrank from appearing to meddle with Sir Ham's disposal of his own money, lest he should seem to be actuated by mercenary motives ; but, on the other hand, a loan to Rio-Brigande struck him as being an investment so reckless, so absurd, that he felt bound earnestly to warn the Knight against it. So at dinner, availing himself of a moment when the servants were out of the room, he said to Mary—

"I feel some scruple about advising your father in money matters, Mary ; but you can do so with more propriety, and I should like you to represent to him that whatever money he lends to Rio-Brigande will be lost."

"I saw the scheme did not please you, dear," answered Mary, with anxious tenderness. "You know something about the country, then ?"

"Too much, unfortunately. It is a state which never pays its debts, and has been three times bankrupt in twenty years. No prudent capitalist would embark a shilling on the prospects of such a country, and as to any recognition of it by our Government, that is out of the question till Rio-Brigande has settled institutions."

"Oh, dear !" exclaimed Mary ; "but Prince Casino has been describing it as such a nice place. It was he who recommended it to papa."

"Casino, eh ? I might have suspected there was somebody of that kind lurking behind. But"—here another light broke upon Mayrose, and he laid down his knife and fork—"I'll be bound, my dear, Casino and Miss Marvell are in love with each other."

"Why, how did you guess ?" enquired Mary, astonished, but not laughing, for the question was too gravely put. "I only found it out—or thought I did—this afternoon."

"Then it is true," continued Mayrose, knitting his brow, and for a few moments he reflected in silence, and then he added, "my suspicions may be unfounded, Mary ; but it looks to me as if Miss Marvell and Casino were conspiring to make a dupe of your father."

"Oh, my dear Freddy, how can you think that ?" exclaimed Mary so aghast that from that moment her appetite left her."

"Well, I don't give it as a fact ; but in such cases a woman's eyes are more observant than a man's, and I advise you to watch for yourself and see. As for me, I shall do my best to dissuade your father from a speculation which I am convinced would ruin him."

This conversation was pursued at intervals till the close of dinner, and Mary undertook to go to Kensington the next morning and diligently reconnoitre the state of affairs. That evening she had to go to a party at Lady Tumb's, but Mayrose did not accompany her. Every moment of his time was required to assist in perfecting the divers clauses of the Universal Suffrage Bill, which was to come on for second reading on the following Monday, it being then Thursday. He was going that evening to a private meeting of the Cabinet, in which the 650 electoral circumscriptions, in which the three kingdoms were to be divided by the new Act, would be carefully studied. Between these cares and the departmental work which occupied him by day, he was growing thin and pale ; but he knew that this was only the beginning of his labours, for the nation was being lashed into strong excitement by the newspapers of all parties, and the battle promised to be a tough one.

CHAPTER XIII.

VIOLET CHEVYCHASE TAKES THE FIELD.

Mary was not the woman to let the grass grow under her feet, and next morning she was at Kensington by breakfast time, trying to get at the truth concerning the loan, and to warn her father, as she had been advised. But for once she found Sir Ham obdurate. Her influence over him seemed to have vanished. He was affectionate, but cut her remonstrances short by running away to the city ; though

before departing he remarked, in a half-angry tone quite new to her, that he trusted Mayrose would requite the obligations owing to his father-in-law by doing what was expected of him.

Mary was not more successful in her efforts to penetrate Grace's position. She was loth to believe her friend guilty of dark designs; and yet she would have suspected truth incarnate if her husband had bidden her so to do. However, after a while she was compelled to reflect that her husband's suspicions had perhaps been hasty. If she had possessed astuteness enough to guess that Grace had for more than a year been planning her ascendancy over Sir Ham, in view of making the Knight serve her at any moment she wished, Mary might have perceived into what meshes her father was being drawn. But not divining Grace's ascendancy, the one link needful to make continuity of design apparent was missing. Mary discovered that Grace had scarcely known Prince Casino a month, and it was impossible, she thought, that in so short a time the two could have fallen in love, got engaged, formed a conspiracy, and carried it out to successful execution against so cautious a man as her father. Besides, Grace showed the utmost artlessness in answering all the questions put to her. "You seem to suspect me of something, dear," she said at last, in an affectionate tone, when Mary had got through what sounded like a searching cross-examination; "what is it?"

"Nothing," answered Mary, evasively, "why should I suspect you? Only my husband thinks that this loan is a bad thing, and I hoped you might try to dissuade papa from it."

"The loan was proposed to Sir Ham by Prince Casino, and Sir Ham saw in it an occasion both of doing good and of earning a great deal of money," answered Grace, with innocence. "The Prince can have no interest in the matter other than that of helping his friend; and Sir Ham has experience enough not to let himself be enticed into any money affair of a hazardous character. I do not see, dear, how I could venture to give Sir Ham advice in an affair of which he must know so much more than I. You forget that I am only a visitor in your father's house."

"That's true," replied Mary, whose heart smote her; and she kissed Grace as usual when she went away. But she was in dire perplexity. She had left Berkeley Square at an hour when polite society are still in their beds, and she shrank from returning to tell Mayrose that her early morning's work had resulted in nothing. She thought she would call on Lady Beaujolais and take counsel of her—in strict confidence, of course. Lady Beaujolais had been very amiable to her of late, and, although the ladies had not reached the point of calling each other Mary and Alice respectively, yet Mary felt that the Countess was about the only friend of her own sex she had. Then Lady Beaujolais' acquaintance with life was so nicely profound that she would assuredly be able to say whether Prince Casino was likely to have unworthy motives in urging the loan; for having never heard of loan commissions, Mary herself was quite at a loss to imagine such motives.

Unfortunately, two hours of most confidential talk with Lady Beaujolais only led to the Countess gathering an entirely wrong impression of the whole affair. It is true that her ladyship prattled during most of the time about her own troubles—the worrying duties that beset her as Lord Chamberlain's wife, the difficult problems in etiquette which she required to solve, the base conduct of a French author, who had threatened to write a pamphlet if his plays were banished from the English stage as immoral—and amid her concern about these afflictions she could only listen with one ear as it were to Mary's narrative and queries. But listening with one ear, she was yet enabled to deliver as luminous a judgment as many a judge who has slept soundly on his bench whilst a case was being tried before him.

"My dear Lady Mayrose," she said impressively, "it is my experience that whenever a man bestirs himself actively in any money business, he has unworthy motives."

"Oh, Lady Beaujolais! Then do you really think the Prince——"

"Well, I think the point is this: Who is Miss Marvell? Nobody. And how much money has she? None. Who is Prince Casino? Nobody."

"But I fancied a Prince was somebody."

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"Not a foreign one," answered the Countess, speaking as if she had now become a sovereign authority on such matters. "You see those Italian princes are sometimes the younger sons, and there are so many morganatic marriages among them that you are afraid to look closely into pedigrees. I suppose Prince Casino's estates—unentailed, mind—would be held in the square outside, and if he is mixing in any money affair with your father I would certainly advise you to keep a watch on him."

This was explicit enough, and Mary drove home revolted at the blackness of mankind in general, and of foreigners in particular. She had asked the Countess to keep her secret, but naturally Lady Beaujolais communicated the story in confidence to several dear friends who called on her in the afternoon. She gave, however, a version of her own, which was that Lord Mayrose's father-in-law being about to issue a loan, Lord Mayrose was very anxious to help him by persuading the Cabinet to recognize some place in America, but that Prince Casino and that forward Miss Marvell were improperly trying to get some of the profits into their own hands. This account was retailed, without evil intentions, before several of the ladies who had formed the Boudoir Cabal; Lady Coralmere, Violet Chevychase, Mrs. Coney Bussle, and Lady Canonlaugh.

Now, Lady Canonlaugh was still smarting under the epigram launched at her by Mary, at Lady Stonehenge's party. She felt towards Mary and her belongings as only a woman can feel who has been publicly exposed to ridicule, and her animosity was not lessened by hearing that Mary stood arrayed against Prince Casino—her whilom tender cavalier, whose truant attentions to Grace Marvell she was disinclined to credit on Mary's sole assertion. Lady Canonlaugh was sufficiently ripe in the ways of the world to know all about loans. Her hatred throwing a lurid light on the transactions which Lady Beaujolais had related, she was enabled to perceive at a glance what advantage might be taken of them to repay her enemy with usury. So she instantly exclaimed, with maliciously feigned wonder, that Lord Mayrose's part in this affair amounted simply to employing State influence to favour his private speculations. "Are you sure of your facts, my dear?" she added: "the thing is so extraordinarily grave."

"Why grave?" asked pretty Lady Beaujolais, who had never glanced at the thing in this light.

"Why, my dear, we have none of us the right to make the Government serve our private interests," answered Lady Canonlaugh, in a most sanctified tone.

"Oh, tell me all about it, Lady Canonlaugh," cried Violet Chevychase, rushing eagerly across the room; I can believe that man capable of anything; but, to begin with, what is a loan?"

"They issue shares, somebody runs off with all the money, and it gets put into the papers," suggested Lady Coralmere, with a smile.

"No; you are thinking of a joint-stock company," interposed Mrs. Coney Bussle, who, as the wife of a pushing M.P., was acquainted with everything, except humour.

Lady Canonlaugh explained very correctly what a loan was, and then described, but less concisely, how a Minister could make his investments in one highly profitable. "Supposing your husband were to take an interest in somebody," she said, affably, to Violet; "it's only supposition, of course; but say he wanted that somebody to get on well in Society, obtain credit of tradesmen, attract people to her house, and for that purpose he was to induce you to present that somebody at Court, and drive about with her in the park——"

"Oh, but he never dare to do such a thing," interrupted Violet, indignantly.

"That is because you are a strong Government, dear," replied Lady Canonlaugh, with a touch of sarcasm. "Lord Mayrose, however, has so much power in the present Cabinet that he might prevail on Lord Lobby to recognize that American State, and then he would be in the exact position of your husband coaxing you to patronize the improper somebody I have imagined."

Exemplified in this way, the offence seemed to Violet more heinous than fancy could picture, and so it did to Lady Coralmere and Mrs. Coney-Bussle. Lady Beaujolais, who had no conscientious scruples about using any Government to

serve her own interests, and who indeed was of opinion that Governments existed only to serve the ends of high-born ladies—Lady Beaujolais bethought her whether it would not be possible to get some of the scrip of this loan for nothing. Now that she was on good terms with the Mayroses the experiment might be worth trying. The same subtle thought was occurring to Mrs. Coney-Bussle, who pondered how she might show Sir Ham Pennywoddle some civility—though this would not prevent her from denouncing Lord Mayrose's shocking behaviour wherever she went; for the crime of having knocked all her false hair off was one that would cry for vengeance till her death-bed. Virtuous Lady Canonlaugh had already concocted a scheme for ascertaining the pros and cons of the loan from Prince Casino, and getting scrip gratis also, through him, if the undertaking were sound.

Violet, however, who did not belong to the voracious order of womankind, reflected only that here at least was a clearly defined malpractice for which Mayrose could be abused, outspokenly vilified, and perhaps brought to account. His former transgressions, capital as they seemed to her, were no offences at all in the eyes of some people, and but very venial sins in the eyes of some others. But even the aggravating persons who hold that a man might marry for money, or sacrifice principle to place, would exclaim at a Minister who tried to swindle the public in the name of Government—for it came to that, so Lady Canonlaugh honourably avouched. Full of this seething idea, Violet resolved to start off and warn her father and mother, her husband, and everybody, that the avenging retribution for Mayrose's heartless conduct to Zellie might begin without delay. She stopped just long enough to hear Lady Canonlaugh repeat all her explanations with additional forcible comments on the honour of England, the purity of statesmanship, and other quaint things; then she fled. Lady Beaujolais would have liked her to stay and be regaled with the lamentable story of that French author's conduct; but Violet was like an excited young huntress, who has long watched for game, and at length sights it.

She drove to Rosemary House, alighted so quickly that it needed her footman's manly arm to prevent her stumbling over her dress, and ran upstairs to the boudoir, where her mother and sister were alone.

Zellie was lying on the sofa near an open window, before which a single lace curtain was drawn, and Lady Rosemary was seated working beside her. Zellie was very pale and weak, and her eyes seemed preternaturally enlarged by the illness through which she had passed. The rays of the afternoon sun slanting through the lace curtain threw the shadow of its variegated tracery on the dress which she was wearing, so that she seemed clothed in some heavy brocade, which added to her look of prostration and langour. Nevertheless she was better that day than she had been for some weeks, and her mother had been gently urging upon her the necessity of taking some definite determination about her marriage. Lord Hor-nette was most chivalrous and forbearing. He came every day to inquire about her health, and sent her regularly each morning large bouquets of choice flowers; but it was evident that the delay and the consciousness of making no progress in Zellie's affections were beginning to tell upon him, and Lady Rosemary remarked that it would not be kind to put upon a man so patient and devoted the slight of continued coldness. It was to be feared that he might grow offended and ask to be released from his engagement.

Zellie listened in silence; but she closed her eyes, and her mother saw a few tears trickle under the lashes. It was best not to notice these tears, so Lady Rosemary, with an inward sigh, changed the subject, and by and bye ceased speaking and worked noiselessly. There had been stillness in the room for some minutes when Violet entered precipitately like a little termagant, her sapphire eyes gleaming, and her lips trembling with impatience to make her disclosure. She scarcely took time to kiss her mother and sister, but exclaimed, "Mamma, I have such horrible news! I always told you Lord Mayrose was a man unworthy of any regard, and now you will see that I was right!" But during the next five minutes her talk was sweet, incoherent babble—interjections and denunciations bristling up like small needles over a texture of narrative all entangled. Violet was aware that she would cruelly wound Zellie by abusing Mayrose, but she thought the time had

come when the marriage with Lord Hornette ought to be accomplished. It provoked her to see her sister fret and pine away; and she hoped that by demonstrating Mayrose to be a mean, dishonourable man, she might succeed at length in destroying her sister's tenacious attachment for him—only she did all this too wildly for effect.

Lady Rosemary had laid down her work, and sat with astonished eyes listening to her younger daughter; but at Violet's first pause, she said, gravely:—

"My dear child, I wish you would collect yourself. I do not understand a word you have been saying."

"Why, mamma, it's plain enough. He wants to foist an improper woman upon society—at least, no, he's in a loan, and they issue shares, and then he'll run away, and it will all be put in the papers. That is how they manage it."

"I can make no sense at all out of such a statement, Violet."

"But, mamma, Lady Canonlaugh and Lady Coralmere were both saying that the honour of England would be compromised, Lady Beaujolais was sure of her facts, and nobody ever heard before of a minister trying to swindle the public."

"Nor will anybody now, you may be sure," replied Lady Rosemary.

Zellie had propped herself on one elbow to hear.

"No, mamma; it's a wicked untruth!" she exclaimed, with a blanched face, and her whole frame quivering. "I do not know why you come and say these things, Violet; but you miss no chance of doing what you know will vex and annoy us. I wish you would stay away and never come near me."

"But it's no untruth, Zellie; and you are quite unreasonable," retorted Violet, with irritation. "I think it is time you should know the truth about certain people who palm themselves off for saints."

"Hush, Violet, you see you are only paining your sister," remonstrated Lady Rosemary, and, having stooped to soothe Zellie, who had fallen back exhausted on her pillow after her outburst, she withdrew, and beckoned Violet to follow her.

They remained an hour together, but Violet must have contrived to make her meaning clearer in private colloquy than she had done before, for when she left the house the Countess, who had now become very serious and agitated, sat down to write a note, which was soon after carried to Berkeley-square.

That is why, when Mayrose returned home to dinner that evening, he found a letter begging him in the most pressing way to call at Rosemary House at 10 o'clock. The Countess promised that she would be waiting alone to see him.

Now, Mayrose had not crossed the threshold of Rosemary House since the morning when the report of his marriage with Zellie had been publicly contradicted.

CHAPTER XIV.

ZELLIE'S DREAM.

He went, however, and without telling his wife where he was going. At dinner Mary had recounted to him her failure to check her father in his loan enterprise; and this, added to the worries of a day's hard labour, had put him out of spirits, for he attached little importance to Mary's rather excited assurances that she was not going to let herself be baffled by her first attempts. He thought her weak and not over shrewd, and would have been strengthened in this impression had she informed him that she had taken Lady Beaujolais into her confidence. But this she wisely avoided doing. Her reticence, however, prevented him from guessing why Lady Rosemary wanted to see him so urgently. He thought over every reason but the right one as he was being driven to the house where he knew Zellie was; and when the Countess came forward and pressed his hands, exclaiming, "My dear Freddy, I should have had no peace if you had not come!" he was at a loss to comprehend what was the matter.

She noticed his surprise, and were soon placed in their true light the day before, and that it had given prevent his father-in-law acting in, gave her instant comfort; and of course things Mayrose told her he had only heard of the loan from much uneasiness, though he was powerless to do anything. He had relied on Mary to remonstrate,

but she had failed. As to the recognition of Rio-Brigande, so far from favouring such a course, he had warned Lord Lobby that day that pressure might be put upon him by Sir Ham; and he had begged the Earl on no account to be influenced by Sir Ham's relationship towards him (Mayrose), for that he should himself vote against the recognition of Rio-Brigande if the absurd question were ever brought before the Cabinet. When Mayrose heard that Society was already busy attributing to him him complicity in the loan, he did not redden or grow angry, for the newspaper abuse levished upon him since he had become a Minister had rendered him callous to slanders—even as Mithridates grew callous to poison by tasting daily thereof. He only shrugged his shoulders. When, however, he ascertained that the rumour had arisen through Mary having called on Lady Beaujolais, and presumably misexplained everything to her, he made a resigned gesture, and said, "Poor Mary! she means well, but will do me a great deal of harm before she has done. I suppose you heard that she mortally offended Lady Canonlaugh the other night. Men are laughing about it in the clubs, but I cannot reproach her for it."

"Yet she is your wife, and you should give her advice," said Lady Rosemary, affectionately. "No man is more capable of moulding a loving woman's character than you."

"I cannot play the part of Mentor, dear Lady Rosemary," said Mayrose, mechanically taking up a book and turning over the leaves. "Our characters are so dissimilar, that if once I began to find fault, I might say more than she would understand and wound her."

"There are ways of finding fault. Mary is very young and her devotion to you would make her take a pleasure in following your counsels."

"I doubt if we ever take a pleasure in being warned of our defects—though, after all, these are no defects which consist only in too great truthfulness," sighed Mayrose. "Besides, I owe my present position to Mary, and if she damages it I shall still be her debtor. A man who has married for money must not crow too much like a master in his own house."

This was so bitterly said, and the remark was so singular, that Lady Rosemary glanced with anxiety at Mayrose. He laid down his book, and stood up to lean against the mantlesheaf, but the Countess held out a hand to him, and he took a seat by her side. "What is it, my dear Frederick—are you not happy?" she inquired with motherly concern; and he did not immediately answer.

But while this scene was being enacted, a silent witness of it had crept into the adjoining room, and was listening to every word of Mayrose's with bated breath.

When Lady Rosemary had come into the small drawing-room to meet Mayrose, she had left Zellie dozing on the sofa in her boudoir, for Zellie was not well enough to go out to evening parties. Towards half-past ten, however, Zellie awoke, and feeling disinclined to sleep again, rose to fetch a book which she thought lay on the table. But the book was not there, so Zellie passed into the next room, found the volume, and was returning with it, when she was stopped by hearing the murmur of voices. She approached the door whence the sounds came, thinking that her father and mother were alone together. But with her fingers on the handle she paused, and all the blood receded from her face, for she had recognized the voice as Mayrose's.

She had not seen him once since his marriage, and had seldom heard his name pronounced, for Lady Rosemary refrained from alluding to him in her presence. She knew that he had become a Minister, and in the *Morning Post*, which her maid brought her in bed every morning, contrary to orders, she frequently read his name, and sometimes short speeches of his, over which she would pore for hours. She had also sent her maid in secret to buy one of his photographs, procurable with those of other prominent public men at all the shops, and that obliging domestic had complied by purchasing her a whole assortment of vignettes and full length cartes de visite. But most of these had been taken more than a year ago, and they showed Mayrose such as he was after he had returned from his travels. A yearning desire now seized Zellie to gaze without being seen at the man whose image was present in her mind day and night—the man whose remem-

brance she had striven to put away, sinking under the effort into an illness which had brought her to death's door. During a minute she battled against the desire, but it was irresistible, and with beating heart and kindling eyes she stole from the room, glided down a broad passage which ran the length of the first floor, and with noiseless steps reached the door of the room next that where her mother and Mayrose were.

This room was one of a suite which were lighted up every evening whether company was expected or not. The folding-doors, by which the rooms communicated with each other, were left wide open; and, as the entrances from the passage were in the corners nearest to these folding-doors, and at right angles with them, anyone who entered cautiously could stand behind the folding-doors, as behind a screen, and see into the next room unobserved. Zellie did this, glancing fearfully on the right and left of her to watch if any tell-tale mirror would reflect her form, and when she saw that there was no danger of this, she advanced on tip-toe, blushing and paling turn by turn at what she was doing, and looked.

The Countess and Mayrose were seated close together. The room was furnished in Japanese style—that is, on walls painted white were stretched pieces of silk with Japanese figures, between frames of gilt bamboo; quaint potteries, blue and red, ornamented the mantleshef and tables; the andirons in the fireplace were supported by huge brass toads, and a square Japanese lantern hung from the ceiling, shedding a queerly soft light over the silent room.

Mayrose's face was turned towards Zellie, and it was an altered face. Work and excitement had thinned it, and the corners of the mouth and eyes were hardened by those lines which set their stamp on every man in a high position who is obliged to refuse much that is asked of him, and to make his will constantly override opposition. But Zellie thought the features beautified by their gravity. Her fascinated glance was fixed upon them with a wistful look of pity for the care they betrayed, and of admiration for the power and courage they revealed. She had promised herself that she would take but one glance and then retreat; but when were such self-promises ever kept? She felt enchained to the spot, for she had come just in time to hear her mother's question, "Are you not happy?" and her heart seemed to stop beating as she waited for the answer.

Mayrose took one of the Countess's hands and pressed it between his.

"No, I am not happy!" said he, wretchedly. "I have nothing to complain of, and nothing gives me satisfaction. It is a just visitation. There is no blessing on those who perjure themselves in swearing that they love a woman when they have only married her from ambition."

"But you did nothing of the sort," faltered the Countess. "These are morbid fancies that are haunting you, my poor boy."

"I never loved Mary, and I do not love her now," answered Mayrose, despondingly. "I do not know what short madness it was that possessed me when I first thought that I could get happiness by obtaining that poor child's money. I fancied myself miserable then, but if all the pangs of those days could return to me with the freedom and self-respect which ought to have made my sufferings easy to bear, I think I should be the happiest man alive."

"But why wish for what is impossible?" asked the Countess, brushing some tears from her eyes. "Your first duty now is to your wife. You should try to love her and make yourself happy with her. If you do not, the time must come when she will find out your true feelings, and then you will have the remorse of having saddened her life along with your own. A woman, you know, never recovers from such a blow."

"That is the dread which embitters every hour of each day," replied Mayrose, with despair. "You asked me why I did not give Mary advice, but I am trembling at each moment lest in some hasty word or look of mine she should discover my secret. I know it would kill her; and if she was hurried to her grave by my fault, I should feel as if I had murdered her with my hand."

"This is dreadful; but you must pray for strength and guidance," said the Countess, unable to check her tears. "You will surmount these melancholy feelings if you are resigned and patient."

"I think it is more likely that my sin will find me out, and bring upon me some crushing and deserved disgrace," was Mayrose's depressed answer. I have a presentiment that such will be the case. This loan which my father-in-law has undertaken has come upon me as a first note of warning. As to Mary, I can show her all kindness, and feign to love her as I do now, but my real sentiments towards her can never change." There was a pause, and then lowering his voice till it scarce rose above a whisper, he bent nearer to the Countess: "Dear Lady Rosemary, you have been as a mother to me—let me make my full confession. This is the first time I have ever mentioned the subject to you, and it shall be the last—but to speak will relieve me. Since my return to England I have loved Zellie with all my heart—oh, how deeply!—and every day seems to add to my love. When I came into this house I trembled like a boy, thinking I might meet her here. If I had done so, God knows how I should have borne it! My pulse throbs faster now from knowing that she is under this roof."

The Countess was crying fast.

"I guessed this long ago, my poor boy! But why did you not tell me? You would have prevented so much unhappiness!"

"I ought to have told you, but Hornette led me to think that you wanted him to marry Zellie. He came to me suddenly. I had no means of knowing what might be your plans, and I feared to be suspected of wishing to marry Zellie for her fortune."

"How could I have thought you capable of such a thing?"

"Well, you see, I was capable of such a thing, for I have done it since; and it was perhaps some preconsciousness of my baseness that made a coward of me. Yet, I feel that if I had married Zellie I could never have stooped to an unworthy act—she would have ennobled my whole being. Well, it was not to be, and I must bear my cross. How is Zellie?"

"She has been very ill," said the Countess, drying her eyes, and waiting some seconds before she could answer. "But now, Frederick, my beloved boy, my son, promise me that Zellie shall never hear anything of this from you. I feared we were going to lose her; but she is better now, and we hope that her marriage will not be put off much longer. Lord Hornette is so much attached to her that her life may be happy if she is never allowed to suspect what you have told me."

"She shall never hear it from me," promised Mayrose, earnestly, though with a moan.

"Much as it may cost you," added the Countess, whose tears would not cease flowing, "when you next meet her—for of course you must meet soon or late—try and make her believe that you are thoroughly happy. If she has ever felt anything more than a sisterly affection for you, the knowledge that your whole heart belongs to your wife will impel her to bestow all her love on her husband."

"Yes; I have done enough mischief as it is, and you may trust me not to do any more. But"—and his voice quavered a little—"thank God I believe in future life, where misunderstandings are cleared up; and there Zellie will hear from me what I am forbidden to tell her now—"

He did not finish his sentence, for Lady Rosemary drew him towards her, and sobbed on his neck. In their embrace they were as mother and son mourning a common sorrow, and when Mayrose left the house he was in a manner comforted. Nothing but his pallor and a deeper seriousness than usual gave trace of the emotions he had undergone.

As for Zellie, white as a winding sheet, she stole from the room as silently as she had entered, and when Lady Rosemary returned to the boudoir where she had left her, she found her daughter apparently sleeping. And it did not appear to be an agitated sleep. The Countess sat down and tried to hold her breath not to awake the sleeper; but Zellie seemed to wake nevertheless. She looked at her mother with a deep, strange glance, wandering, yet soft. "Mamma, dear, I have had a dream, and I thought my illness left me. I feel quite well now."

CHAPTER XV.

LORD HORNETTE PUTS OUT HIS STING.

The characters of high-born women have often no chance of asserting themselves. From girlhood to old age the woman who is rich and of good family lives in a temperate atmosphere of easily gratified desires, or, if she have a whim difficult to state, it must be a small one to be struggled for with the smaller qualities or foibles of human nature; and conventional restraints prevent her from exhibiting even these too markedly. Custom and prejudice have made the woman's part in life very small. She is expected to be chaste, but if she comply with this rule Society credits her with all other virtues in favour of this one, and she may pass through the world without anybody suspecting that she possessed idiosyncracies of heart and mind which in a man would have constituted a strong or heroic character. It is only when some deep passion is thwarted that a convulsion may arise, upheaving all the contents of a woman's heart, as the riches and flints of the soil are thrown up by an earthquake. The convulsion seldom lasts long; but as the eruption which rends the surface of the earth may permanently alter the outlines of a tract of country, so the brief crisis through which a woman passes after some cross or great joy in love may, and generally does, modify the whole tone of her mind thenceforth. It is then that her education and natural instincts may begin to operate with unsuspected force for good or evil.

From the day of Mayrose's interview with Lady Rosemary it was noticed that Zellie's health mended rapidly. The Countess attributed this to Providential succour, the doctors to their medicines; but all pronounced the change almost miraculous. Colour returned to the patient's cheeks, strength to her limbs, animation to her voice and eyes. She begged to be treated no longer as an invalid, and talked of going out to the parties and riding in the Park every day so soon as ever the palor of the sick room should have finally forsaken her. By the end of three days the Countess commenced hoping that all traces of Zellie's affection for Mayrose had been obliterated, and that the marriage with Lord Hornette might soon be happily solemnized; but it was on this third day when Lord Hornette called to pay his usual visit, that Zellie asked to receive him alone; and she then told him, with little preface, that she wished her engagement with him to be broken off.

She was wearing a white and blue muslin dress, and had put a red rose in her hair, and another in her girdle. If she had wished to excite Lord Hornette's love by heightening her revived beauty with a touch of coquetry she could not have appeared to better effect. He was deeply attached to her, and she had never seemed to him so well worth winning as now, when returning health seemed to have made their wedding immediately possible. Love had rendered him so patient with her—he who was patient with nobody else, man or woman—that he did not at once accept her rebuff.

"If you desire our marriage to be postponed again, Lady Zell, I will willingly consent, much as a long delay would pain me," he said, grown a little pale.

"I do not wish the marriage postponed, Lord Hornette, but definitely broken off," she answered, toying with a smelling-bottle she had taken from the table.

"And may I enquire why?" he asked, his anger beginning to rise.

"You must know why. You are aware that I never loved you, for I frankly told you so."

"You did tell me that you had formed an unrequited attachment for a person whose name you did not mention; but you added that if I would be content with what it was in your power to give, you would endeavour to do your duty as my wife." The Earl spoke in a tone of trembling indignation, as his hand clutched the brim of his hat.

"Well, I have altered my mind," replied Zellie, with cruel calmness. "I can never be your wife; but to sooth your self-respect I leave you free to say that it was you who broke off with me, and to allege any reasons you please."

The Earl's lips became ashy white, and his glance kindled as he answered—

"My self-respect will not be soothed by telling a falsehood. If you refuse me

after having allowed me so long to believe in your fidelity, I shall say simply that you refused me."

"Or that I have jilted you. You are welcome to circulate either version, Lord Hornette," she said, rising. "I am very much obliged for your own constancy, but let this be the last confidential meeting between us."

When Lord Hornette had gone away, well-nigh stunned by this unexpected and feelingless rejection, Zellie ran to tell her mother what she had done. But in the Countess's boudoir she found her sister, who had just arrived, and Lady Rosemary was not in the room. Zellie embraced Violet, and straightway appraised her of what had happened. "You may say everywhere that I am not going to marry Lord Hornette, Violet. I have just sent him away."

"You have done that!" said Violet, starting up in stupefaction. "Well, of all the foolish, wilful things—"

"I have done it because I pleased," interrupted Zellie, coldly. "And listen to me, Violet. The other day you tried to wound me, by saying wicked, false things about—about—you know whom. Well, we are alone here as sisters, and I promise you that if ever you breathe another word against him in my hearing, I shall never see or speak to you again, even though you crawled to my feet and asked me to forgive you."

Violet waxed rebellious, the blood rose to her face, and her lips quivered; but meeting Zellie's determined glance as she essayed to speak, she saw that her sister was in one of those moods when women and girls must not be pushed to lengths. Happily, she loved her sister, and so put a curb on her tongue; but the effort almost made her chest burst.

"Well, as you choose. Be provoking and thoughtless, and make mamma and me, and everyone who loves you, miserable," she said, with gulping resignation. But after a moment a gust of anger got the better of her, and she asked naively, "I may say what I think about—that man when you are not there?"

"Behind my back you may say and do whatever the malice and envy of others can suggest to a prejudiced woman. But remember this—that if ever I hear of your assailing him, I shall defend him, no matter what others may think of me; and if ever I find him suffering from slander or conspiracy in which you have a part, I shall treat you as my worst enemy. So be warned. Now I am going to tell papa and mamma."

Lord Rosemary, though he objected to ruffle himself, was distressed by Zellie's communication, for he did not see how after this he could face the Duke of Bumblebeigh, with whom he liked to play whist; Lady Rosemary was sincerely grieved. But the combined chagrin of Zellie's parents was nothing beside the wrath of Lord Hornette. He left the house in a fury, and spoke roughly to his coachman, a phenomenon which proved the agitation of his spirit, for, like a thorough nobleman, he was generally much more civil to his inferiors than to his equals. Not knowing that Violet was in the house at the time of his interview with Zellie, he ordered his coachman to drive him to her house in Grosvenor Square, but at Hyde Park Corner his excitement had become too intense to allow of his remaining pent-up in a brougham. He alighted, and cooled himself by going through the park on foot. It thus happened that when he arrived in Grosvenor Square, Violet, not less excited than himself, had got there before him. He found her standing on the steps of her house, with a brace of footmen holding the hall door open behind her, while she impatiently watched her husband and Lord Beaujolais experimenting the latter's invention for cutting adrift a runaway team.

This was a very important invention, and Lord Beaujolais much regretted that he had not become Master of the Horse, instead of Lord Chamberlain, in order that he might have tried it in Her Majesty's stables. The French authors and the people who wanted invitations to the Queen's parties were beginning to bore him, and he was glad to leave the management of them to his wife. The sphere in which his own genius best shone was the hunting-field, the box of a four-in-hand, or a phaeton, and as soon as he perceived Hornette, he waved his whip and cried, "See here Hornette! isn't this neat?"

Neat it was. Although a crowd of some dozen nursemaids and tradesmen's

boys had gathered on the pavement of the demure square, Lord Beaujolais, not minding this publicity, set his pair of chesnuds in motion, and at the moment when they had reached a sharp trot suddenly turned a handle beside him. The pole was instantly unhooked, and fell to the ground, being protected from damage by an india-rubber cushion, fastened underneath. At the same time the traces dropped and trailed; the phaeton rolled for a few yards further by impetus, and then stopped; while the horses—who were quiet beasts, brought out for the purpose—were checked in their course by the groom, who had run on ahead. Lord Beaujolais was as radiant as Watt must have been when he watched the kettle boil; but Lord Hornette gave a shrug, and said testily, "If you patent that, the coachmen of old ladies will be casting off their cattle whenever they find them frisky, and there'll be nothing but runaway horses crashing all down Regent-street. But I've no time for this. Come in, do! Chevy Chase, I want to speak to you."

"Yes, come in!" besought Violet, stamping one of her little boots, and talking with Lord Hornette she went into the house, the other two gentlemen following.

"I see you have heard everything," exclaimed Lord Hornette, when they had reached the drawing-room.

"Yes, everything; and its all that base Lord Mayrose's fault!" indignantly rejoined Violet, who could give full career to her feelings now that she was not under her sister's eye. "She is quite mad about Lord Mayrose, Zellie is; and you had better pay no attention to what she says, Lord Hornette. She will be ashamed of herself when she is well enough to know how rude she has been."

"Rude is a weak term," protested the Earl, whose forehead was wrinkled with choleric lines. "She treated me as if I was a servant who had stolen something. I never saw her in such a temper. Something has occurred since the other day when I last spoke to her."

"You don't mean to say my wife's sister has refused you?" inquired young Lord Chevy Chase, aghast.

"Yes, and I tell you, Lord Mayrose must have found means of exciting her," ejaculated Violet, throwing down her bonnet on a sofa. "She was quite reasonable a week ago; and oh, I know of no punishment strong enough for a man who does such things—a married man mind, and one who was brought up with us like a brother. If there were duelling in England, such an odious wretch would not be allowed to live a week."

"Come, come," interposed Lord Beaujolais, who hated rows, "I've heard nothing but abuse of Mayrose for the last twelve-month. 'Pon my soul, he's not such a bad fellow as that."

"Yes, you and Lady Beaujolais have been supporting him of late," cried Violet, turning round upon his Lordship like a scratching kitten. "Yet you ought to know what his good-fellowship is worth by this time—a man who married for money, then betrayed his principles for place, and is now at present going to swindle the public by a loan."

Now Lord Hornette had heard of the Rio-Brigande Loan, for Prince Casino, in the interest of that financial concern, was hinting everywhere that Lord Mayrose had a share in the concern, and had tacitly promised that the British Government should recognize *Senor Descamisado*. Lord Hornette had thought this rumour monstrous, and had disbelieved it; but disappointment prepares us capitally for being unjust, and now that he had been rejected by Zellie, the Earl was disposed to believe anything against the man whom he felt to be his only rival.

Judging by these new lights, too, the whole of Mayrose's past doings became low and mean. Lord Hornette forgot that he had been foremost to extol Mayrose's motives in marrying Mary Pennywoddle, and that he had given himself much trouble to convert others to his views. He was now ready to look upon the marriage as disgraceful. As to Mayrose's political attitude, the Earl had never been able to think with patience of that; but as so many other men had deserted the true faith, he had been willing to concede that Mayrose had acted, like them, from conviction. However this idea ceased to be longer tenable, and the loan affair came like a crowning sin, adding weight to all the others. After Lord Hornette had sat for an hour having his blood lashed into froth by all the things which

Violet could imagine to irritate, under pretense of appeasing, him, he sprang up and seized his hat.

"I had put down that fellow's name for the Brummel, and he was to be baloted for this week. I shall just go and find out the truth about this loan, and if the facts are as we think, I shall withdraw his name, and set a public affront upon him. That will do to begin with, until we can get him cut by every decent man."

Violet protested that it was superfluous to institute inquiries; but Lord Hornette did things methodically even when he was unjust. He departed from Grosvenor Square at a quick step, hailed a hansom at the square corner, and made for St. James-street, guessing that he should find the Italian Prince lunching at the Brummel after his wont. But within a few yards of the club he overtook Sir Ham Pennywoddle, who had just been holding a long conference with the Prince, and supplying him with funds to advertise and puff the loan. This was a godsend. Lord Hornette stopped the cab, and sprang out.

"How do you do, Sir Ham?" he said, with dry affability. "I hear you are going to issue a loan. Is it true that the Cabinet mean to help you by recognizing Rio—Rio—whatever it is?"

"Yes, my lord," wheezed Sir Ham, glad to be shaken hands with by the heir of the house of Drone in St. James street; "the loan'll come out shortly, and it'll be a good investment. My son-in-law'll make Lord Lobby recognize Rio-Brigande, else the public mightn't bite, you know——." The poor knight had an idea that Lord Hornette was anxious to buy shares, and he pledged Mayrose's responsibility in the matter because he honestly trusted that he should bring his son-in-law to confer the obligation that was expected of him—a very small obligation, as it appeared to Sir Ham.

"Thanks; that's all I wanted to know," answered the Earl, shaking the Knight's hand again, for he did not think a City man was dishonored by doing queer monetary things, it being the nature of men east of Temple Bar to act queerly by everybody. Leaving Sir Ham, the Earl strode into the club and passed into the dining-room, where he found Prince Casino lunching gaily with Sir Windsor Chatt. Almost all the tables were filled with good company, the pick of high-life manhood. Hock and seltzer rippled into coloured glasses; corks of sparkling Moselle were popping; servants were mixing mayonnaise at the centre table, and the air, perfumed with strawberries, quavered with the echoes of light anecdotes concerning turf, stage, Parliament, or absent ladies.

Lord Hornette was desirous, for form's sake, that what he had heard from Sir Ham should be confirmed to him by a second witness. So he approached Prince Casino, and propounded to him the same question as he had set the Knight. He was answered to the same effect, but with more gush of detail; for the Prince, having just received a heavy cheque, saw all things concerning the loan in rose colour. There was really no reason, so far as he could discern, why Lord Mayrose should not confer the trumpety service of getting a rising State recognized by the British Government, and therefore, like Sir Ham, he talked of the service as if it had been distinctly promised. Then, nudging the Earl, he added—

"There will be much profit, *mon cher* Hornette, and of course Milord Mayrose, as Sir Pennywoddle's son-in-law, will pick up some."

"Well, Cass, you are quite right to get men of that sort to help you, and profit if you can," said the Earl, with quiet contempt. "You are only doing your business; but a Minister who consents to be your tool is a novelty in England."

The Prince stared as he stuffed a piece of *foie gras* into his mouth; but Lord Hornette was already gone. He walked into the reading-room, and taking a pen went to a chimney-piece over which hung the list of candidates who were down for the next ballot. He ran his pen through Mayrose's name and his own, then turning round, addressed some twenty members who were scattered about reading and chafing.

"I had proposed Mayrose for admission to our club, but I have just struck him off. The man is a cad, not fit to sit down among gentlemen."

A buzz of startled amazement ran round, for most of the members had been talking about the debate on that famous Universal Suffrage Bill which was to be

commenced next night in the Commons, and speculating on the difficulty which the Cabinet would have in carrying it through the Lords—a difficulty of which Mayrose would probably have to bear the brunt. One or two of the members who were on good terms with Mayrose sprang up, and all exclaimed at the astounding insult thus offered to a Minister of State. But Lord Hornette threw down his pen contemptuously, stared at the company to see if there were any who would pick up the glove, and then with a vicious frown disappeared into the writing room, where he at once sat down and indited the following epistle:—

“Brummel Club.

“MY LORD,—I had proposed you for admission to the Brummel Club, but owing to circumstances which have come to my knowledge, and which you can guess without my specifying them, I have this day withdrawn your name; and I have publicly stated in the presence of several members of the Club that I consider you unworthy to sit down among gentlemen. Should you require further satisfaction of me than that contained in these lines, Lord Chevy Chase and my brother, Lord Adolphus Drone, will receive any friends who may be disposed to second you.

“Your obedient servant,

“HORNETTE.”

“To the Right Honourable Viscount Mayrose,” &c., &c.

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR HAM'S ULTIMATUM.

Lord Hornette's letter having been sent by post was delivered in the evening, while Mayrose was out. It was laid on his study-table, with some half dozen others; but as Mayrose did not return home till the small hours, he deferred opening it till morning. When he had read it through he thought a moment, took a pen and at once answered.

DEAR HORNETTE,—There are two ways of treating your letter, but I prefer replying as if we were still at Eton, and telling you not to make a goose of yourself. If one of us have any right to complain of the other it is certainly not you, as you may acknowledge if you scrutinize your conscience. As to Brummel, I shall find another proposer since you withdraw. Believe me, it would not break my heart if I were blackballed for that exalted institution; but you know me sufficiently to be aware that I never sit down tamely under childish impertinence, even when it comes from an old friend.

“Yours faithfully,

MAYROSE.”

This was written in the quarter of an hour preceding breakfast, before Mary had yet come down. When Mayrose had sealed it his eye singled out from the heap of other letters an envelope directed in a lady's hand. It proved to be from Lady Beaujolais, and served to explain Lord Hornette's irate effusion:—

“MY DEAR LORD MAYROSE,—I write in great haste to warn you that Azalea Carol has rejected Lord Hornette, and that the fault of this is being laid upon you. Violet Chevy Chase spoke in my husband's presence about it, and said *most dreadful* things about you. Lord Hornette was there too, and Lord Beaujolais declares he never saw him so exasperated. Of course I do not believe a word Violet says, but I have thought it well to write to you about this, so that if there were any truth in it you might be *cautious*, for the Drones are very spiteful when provoked. I must add that people seem to be angry with you because of your father-in-law's loan.

“Very sincerely yours,

“ALICE BEAUJOLAIS.”

“P. S.—If the loan is really a good thing I hope you will let me have some shares—only a hundred or so. And I see the Bishopric of Magdala is vacant. I am sure you will be glad of my recommending you a *most deserving* man—Mr. Simpkin, our rector. He has eleven children and a twelfth expected, poor man. Please burn this.—A. B.”

Mayrose burned it as desired, and did not mention the receipt of it, nor of Lord Hornette's letter, to Mary. During breakfast Mary descanted with no little excitement on some symptoms of coldness she had observed in certain ladies at a party the night before. She had been questioned with an affectation of interest about the

loan, and some gentlemen had persisted in talking to her in a tone of persiflage about the picturesque beauty of Rio-Brigande and the greatness of Senor Descamisado. "They appeared to think it was you who were starting the loan," said she, with animation, as she poured out the tea. "It was all I could do to restrain myself from saying that papa had not started it either, but had been led into it by designing people."

"I hope you did restrain yourself," said Mayrose, nervously; "they would not have believed you."

"I restrained myself, dear, because I thought you would not like me to give those tattlers a piece of my mind," answered Mary, meekly. "But the more I think about this, the more I am sure that you were right about Grace Marvell; and I mean to go to Kensington this morning to tax her openly with her treachery, and tell her to leave papa's house."

"I would not do that. It is too late now; and Sir Ham would not allow you to give such an order."

"What, not under his own roof! Why, I will tell papa how cruelly he has been deceived—how Grace and the Italian are plotting to ruin him."

"A man of your father's experience, my dear child, does not credit that people can deceive him," said Mayrose, breaking his egg. "Besides, we have no proof positive. The best thing I can do is to sound Leech, who is a great ally of Miss Marvell's. Perhaps he knows something of the matter, and will be able to warn the girl; but I repeat, it is too late to stop the loan—it has broken upon both of us like a storm, and we must submit to the drenching."

Quilpin Leech had of late come to live in Mayrose's house. He breakfasted alone, but was always in the study by half-past nine, answering letters or compiling notes sent him overnight. He was the same mournful-looking object as ever. He never smiled; his large ears seemed to grow more and more at right angles with his face; and the wisp of rebellious hair at the apex of his head bristled up like a point of interrogation, as though wondering whether the eccentric melancholy of its possessor would ever cease. As Leech was erudite enough to furnish most historical and even statistical notes required of him without much consulting books of reference, and as the pace of his copper-plate hand-writing was well nigh telegraphic, he had plenty of spare time on his hands, and employed it as usual in hoaxing persons. He delighted in sending anonymous letters to great officers of State, telling them (under mysterious feminine signatures, and on mauve paper) that titled ladies had fallen in love with them; and he had slept soundly one night after having caused a judge of the Common Pleas, a big Peer, a puritanical M.P., and a Court dignitary, to pace about the whole evening on the four sides of Eaton Square, waiting for a veiled lady with a cherry bow at her throat, who never turned up. But his chief joy was in roasting Mayrose's valet, Bino, who confidently believed, as we have once explained, that the police of Europe were on the lookout for him. By the kind help of Government clerks disguised as policemen, Quilpin Leech had been able to make Bino lead a dog's life, and had one evening—Mayrose being absent—gone the length of arresting him, and conveying him in a cab to Hampstead, where the pseudo-police left him on the Heath, in a blinding rain, to find his way home as he could.

Though Bino had been silent about this adventure, Mayrose had heard of it, as well as of other strange quips, from indirect sources; and one might think he would have felt diffident about taking his queer Secretary into counsel on any serious subject. But he was aware of the sound sense which lurked under Leech's fanciful nature, and therefore, on joining him after breakfast, confessed his anxieties about the loan, and the part which he feared Grace Marvell had taken in it. Quilpin Leech listened gravely, brushing the flies away from his head with a pen-wiper, for it was the summer, and the weather was warm. At the mention of Grace's name he knit his brow slightly. He remembered too well what she had often said to him about her eagerness to acquire a brilliant social position; but he was loth to believe that the woman he loved so hopelessly, yet so truly, would strive after this end by any unworthy means—and he would have been more loth to avow the belief even had he harboured it.

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"Miss Marvell cannot be concerned in the plot," he answered mournfully, catching a fly and putting him in the ink-pot; "or at least not consciously—though that Italian poodle is trying to use her as an instrument."

"I daresay that is it, but if she is really a good girl, just warn her of the injury she may do Sir Ham, and of the great inconvenience she is causing me. I know she does not like me, but I think she would not gratuitously bring annoyance on my head."

"Why should she not like you?" asked Leech, opening his grey eyes wide.

"I am sure I don't know, but it is easy to see she does not. Hint to her though, that if she wants to marry Casino, it would be easy to find the man some honest means of making money without his meddling with Sir Ham's affairs."

"I'm d——d—I beg pardon, I'm blessed if I give her any hint about marrying that son of a dancing dog," exclaimed the Secretary, catching a blue-bottle, which he exterminated with a ruthlessness out of keeping with his principles. "I'll tell you what, though, I'll warn her what I think of that Italian, and if that won't do, I'll get the fellow out in a field somewhere, and give him a few arguments *ad canem*, that is with a stick."

"Don't do anything stupid, for we can't stop this loan, which is already half settled; all we can do is to prevent my father-in-law falling wholly into the hands of that loose fish, and committing further mistakes. But now I must leave you to answer my letters, for I am steeped in work; this is going to be a busy day."

It was in truth the very busy day when the debate on the Suffrage Bill was going to commence in the Commons. All the members not bedridden had come up to town, and along with them more Peers than had ever been seen at one time in the metropolis. The clubs were also gorged with country squires, who had hurried up to assure themselves with their own eyes whether it were seriously proposed to confer the right of voting on every clod-crusher and farm-yard wench in England. Bewildered groups of these worthies could be seen discussing at the corners of St. James's street and Pall Mall, and their faces were hot, and their eyes fiery. However, with the touching faith of country folk in those who govern them, they still hoped some religious spirit of patriotism would breathe through Parliament at the eleventh hour, and cause the unhallowed Bill to be rejected.

But there was no chance of this, at least in the Commons. Mr. Paradyse and his party anathematised Mr. Paramount with all the fury of men who have been outwitted, and it was passably touching to hear their lamentations over the immorality of a man who had done nothing more than they themselves would have tried to do had they fancied it would have brought them back to office. The destruction of the Constitution was, indeed, regarded by Mr. Paradyse's followers as their own special business, which they were patented to exercise by Divine Right. They had all looked forward to a long career of usefulness and salaries by abolishing first this institution and then the other, but all in prudent order, as the interests of their party should dictate. There were squads of promising young barristers who had calculated on earning glory for themselves by the advocacy of universal suffrage in twenty year's time; and others half-way up the ladder, who, at the last election, had hesitated to pledge themselves to such a mild measure as household suffrage in counties, from not knowing whether Mr. Paradyse were disposed to go that length. But here was Mr. Paramount, who at one stroke was about to wrest from them the pretext for a quarter of a century's snug tactics and agitation; and their rancour against him was as that of a man who should have planned a comfortable burglary for some distant date, and found that a quicker compeer had forestalled him. In such cases the disappointed burglar is always the most vociferous in crying, "Stop thief!"

For all this, Mr. Paradyse's party saw themselves compelled to support Mr. Paramount, because the "Great Voice of the Nation" had pronounced for the Bill. That great voice had been yelling in Hyde Park for the last five or six Sundays; and the Paradyseist newspapers, which had at first attacked the Bill, had promptly veered round on perceiving their sale diminish. The *Reporter*, too, was thundering out daily satires at the party who pretended falsely to be "friends of the people"; and goading up all the tag-rag and bob-tail of our intelligent king-

dom not to let Mr. Paradyse dole out reforms to them by the spoonful, as if they were children. Moreover there were the women, and these shrieked loudest of all.

Yes, they shrieked aloud, clamouring for their "Rights." It had often been said that the more modest section of womankind had no ambition to vote, and this was so far true that as long as the majority of men had resolved not to give them a vote, and had visited with a kind of social ostracism those who held out for votes, the modest woman had cautiously avoided incurring such ostracism. But at heart every woman feels that she is quite as competent to exercise the suffrage as any man; and it had long been predicted by judges of feminine nature that if ever the ugly sex betrayed weakness in dealing with the female question a tidal movement would set in strong enough to sweep all resistance to the winds. The time for this movement had now arrived, thanks to Mr. Paramount. In drawing-rooms ladies enthusiastically extolled the Premier's liberalism and gallantry, and out of doors the less timid representatives of the sex walked the streets with banners and petitions. A monster meeting of determined females had also been held in Trafalgar Square, and it is needless to say that all the speeches savoured of that delicacy and forbearance which ever marks the utterances of Persecuted Woman when she wants anything strongly.

Therefore the only strenuous opposition which the Bill had to dread was from the Peers; and public interest really centred more expectantly on the debate in their Lordships' House than in that of the Commons. It was said that the fight among the noble lords in front of the woollack would be the longest and fiercest of the reign, and as Lord Lobby, the leader, was truly not equal to the task of fighting fiercely, the Paramountists were beginning to confess that they built their hopes on Mayrose. Our friend was aware of this, and hence the great anxiety he had bestowed on the Bill. He had toiled at it with Mr. Paramount and the Crown lawyers till it had become in a large part his own work, and he was desirous of watching every step of its progress through the Lower House to detect its feeble points. So punctually at four o'clock on the afternoon of the Commons' debate he walked into the Lower House, and took his seat in the Peers' Gallery. In so doing he was conscious of an almost exaggerated respect paid him by the Paramountist Peers, three or four of whom obsequiously made way for him that he might have a prominent seat. On the other hand, the Peers who had always been opposed to Mr. Paramount, or had broken with him, had begun to treat Mayrose with a strange coldness and some contempt. It was evident that the ugly rumours concerning Sir Ham's loan had been prejudicial to him; and he could not help feeling that even the respect of his own partisans was traversed by a shade of suspiciousness, as if it were a respect awarded rather to his important position at the present crisis than to his private worth.

Soon after Mr. Speaker had ascended the chair, capped with his bush of horse-hair, and while the Ministers were being badgered by the usual half-hour's impertinent questions, Lord Hornette entered the House, buttoned up to the throat, grim and savage-looking. He stared hard and haughtily at Mayrose, whose note he must have just received, and strode to his seat below the gangway among the half-hundred of true-blues. The minute after, Lord Lobby, the Foreign Secretary, crept into the Peer's Gallery, seated himself beside Mayrose, and whispered:—

"That loan is an unfortunate business, and is setting many Peers and women against you. Sir Ham Pennywaddle dodged me down a passage just now to speak about it as I presume, but I escaped. Could you not put a stop to the thing?"

The Earl of Lobby was an amiable Minister, with a pot-belly, and a mouth wide as a frog's. He had pepper-and salt whiskers, wore his hat at the back of his head, and dressed with extreme care—affecting light-colored cravats, blue or gray, and white waistcoats. His policy in life had mostly consisted in being dodged down passages and escaping; and he had so incurable an aversion for grieving anybody with a "No," that he was utterly unable to return a plain answer to the simplest question. Often, when anything went wrong, he suggested ruefully, as he had just done to Mayrose, that the thing "should be stopped;" but he much preferred leaving the stopping to others instead of performing it himself. He would have walked straight out of the Cabinet, and renounced forever the society

of Ambassadors, which he dearly loved, had it been insisted of him that he should be energetic and candid.

"Couldn't you stop the thing?" repeated His Lordship, nodding blandly to members on both sides of the House, for he had friends everywhere.

"There is nothing to stop," answered Mayrose. "If my father-in-law chooses to fling his money out of the window I can only remonstrate."

"Yes, of course, but he's very vexatious, and—by Heavens, here he comes," groaned the Earl, starting as if he would fly.

But there was no flying. The Peers being in those seats just behind the bar, where they can be easily accosted by members passing under the clock, Sir Ham waddled forward, laid his two hands on the ledge in front of them, stood on tiptoe, and turned up his red round face towards them.

"Here, I've caught you both together," he gasped, like a man who has achieved a feat and is pleased. "Now, Mayrose, just tell Lord Lobby to give me a reply about recognizing Rio-Brigande."

"The thing is quite impossible," answered Mayrose, relieving his colleague of all responsibility, to the latter's untold joy. "Whatever might be Lord Lobby's personal desire to oblige you, he cannot give official expression to it."

"I should always desire to oblige Sir Ham Pennywoddle," protested the Foreign Secretary, flourishing a cambric handkerchief, with great politeness.

"Then just listen," said the Knight, with kindling eyes. "I shall vote against this here Bill."

The menace came out suddenly, like the popping of a big paper-bag, and was quite as ludicrous. Mayrose sat astonished, and Lord Lobby, though full of anguish, could not repress a smile; but Sir Ham was not smiling. With cheeks suffused and eyeballs agleam like wet gooseberries, he stuttered—"Yer want to ruin me then, Mayrose—me, yer own father-in-law; the man that gave yer all that money when you married Mary!"

One or two of the neighbouring Peers pricked up their noble ears. Mayrose, red and white by turns, leaned forward to whisper—though his voice vibrated—"Pray contain yourself, Sir Ham. What have I to do with this matter?"

"You've everything to do with it," stammered the indignant Knight; "and I tell yer I'll vote against the Bill, and speak against it; and so will my friend Sholefiddle, the member for Billingsgate."

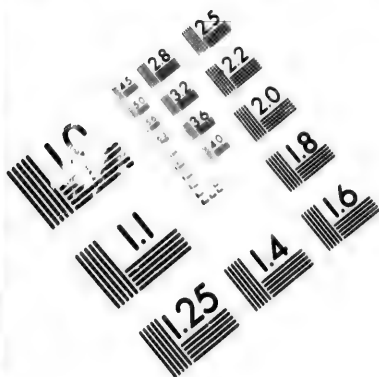
"You and Mr. Sholefiddle may do as you please."

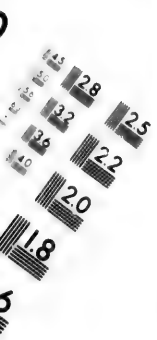
"But I'll do more than that," proceeded the Knight, more and more choleric. "You're a tryin' to stop my climbin' high because you're ashamed o' me, and you're settin' my own child ag'in me—don't tell me, I had it from her own lips. But you wasn't ashamed o' me, Mayrose, when you came a sneakin' round me for my daughter, and the money I'd made by them sausages and oyster-shells!"

"Really, Sir Ham, I do beg—" pleaded Lord Lobby, quite against at such plain language.

"Yer may beg what you like, my lord, and may-be beggin' is not an uncommon trick among Peers," retorted Sir Ham, raising his voice, as if he had lost his respect for everybody and for everything except the money he feared to lose. "I don't care who hears me neether, for I think your be'aviour is mean, Mayrose; and they told me it 'ud be so, for everyone has a poor opinion of you. But you mark my words, if you expect to get anything by this you're mistaken—for I'll leave every farthing I have away from Mary and you—so just sleep a night over it."

The Knight put his finger and thumb together, and snapped them with a thud which reached Mr. Speaker, and caused him to arch his eyebrows. This done, he turned on his heel just at the moment when, the questioning being over, Mr. Paramount rose to his legs, amid a tremendous gust of party cheers, to introduce the Universal Suffrage Bill. Mayrose prepared to listen to his chief's speech in a frame of mind not enviable. As for Lord Lobby, he had become limp with emotion, and the neighbouring Peers were murmuring in one another's ears.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE LADIES' GALLERY.

The debate on the Universal Suffrage Bill raged till 3 o'clock in the morning, and was then adjourned till the morrow, on the motion of Lord Hornette. The speeches were fierce, but Mr. Paradyse's prudent party directed their shafts against Mr. Paramount rather than against the Bill, for the hideous fear of not being elected by the reformed constituencies paralyzed the tongue of each honourable member. Mr. Paradyse's three-hour oration was an impassioned attack on Mr. Paramount's motives; and also an earnest demonstration of how much better the Bill would have been had it been introduced by himself (Mr. Paradyse). We know that earnestness was Mr. Paradyse's dominant virtue. When he was in office, and made appointments untenable on any legal or moral ground, the admiring newspapers of his party argued that this was all owing to his excess of conscientiousness; and when he was in opposition, the earnest desire to get back to office, and exert his excessive conscientiousness for the public good, led him into displays of eloquence at once beautiful and holy. On this occasion he rose sore all over from the sarcasms which Mr. Paradyse's had stuck into him like pin-thrusts; and, having plied his earnest, angry tongue like a broad sword in retaliation for this needle-wit, Mr. Paradyse added, with vehemence, that he should offer uncompromising opposition to those clauses of the Bill which dealt with the distribution of seats.

Mr. Paramount's Bill provided that there should be one member for every 50,000 inhabitants, but the circumscriptions projected kept the borough representation distinct from the rural, giving, in fact, one member to every 50,000 peasants, and one to every 50,000 citizens. Mr. Paradyse declared that this distinction must cease to exist, and that the circumscriptions should be arranged to include citizens and peasants indiscriminately, to the end, no doubt, that in the majority of instances the rural votes might be swamped by those of the townfolk. His followers went on the same tack, and the only opposition to the Bill *in toto* came from those sturdy true-blues below the gangway, who, led on by Mr. Sterling and Lord Albert Drone, said a great many fine things which other honourable gentlemen felt, though they feared to express them. When the debate was adjourned till the morrow—which was a Wednesday—a customary discussion arose about the rights of private members; for a busy politician, who had charge of the Bill for allowing Shakers to hold their dances in the churches of the Establishment, uttered a feeling protest against having his annual speech and motion elbowed out of the way. But he was shouted down, and the House rose, divining by Lord Hornette's ugly looks that he would deliver a few hard truths more telling than anything the Shakers' champion could have to say.

Mayrose lingered till the end of the debate, and, when it was finished, waited for Mr. Paramount in the lobby. The Premier came, surrounded by a noisy troop of adherents, who were congratulating him on his splendid speech, and he made straight for Mayrose, taking him by the arm, and asking him for a lift home. The two crossed Westminster Hall together, and as soon as they were in Mayrose's brougham, the Prime Minister alluded with concern to Sir Ham's behaviour, which had excited attention.

"Dandelion tells me that your father-in-law means to vote and speak against the Bill, and threatens to make the *Reporter* turn round on us. Can he be in earnest?"

"I think he is out of his senses!" exclaimed Mayrose, who had been fretting all the evening after his scene with Sir Ham, and whose irritation now broke out hotly. "Sir Ham was coarse and insolent to me, and I can only conclude that the sharpers among whom he has fallen have turned his head."

"It would have been no great matter to recognize Rio-Brigande, if such a fuss had not been made about it," answered the Premier, soothingly. "But perhaps you had better give Sir Ham some hopes. There is no saying but that country may settle down, and its recognition would follow as a matter of course. If

Sir Ham is told this, he may take patience till after the Bill is voted. This is the essential."

"I really see no good in humouring any improper demand," answered Mayrose, with impatience. "I honestly believe my father-in-law is not in his right mind for the present, and I would let him act as it suits him."

"Perhaps that is the soundest course," answered the Premier, as if he did not think so. "Sir Ham, however, may draw Mr. Sholefiddle and some others, which would be unfortunate. But there is another annoying matter: What was that disturbance between yourself and Lord Hornette at the Brummel?"

Mayrose, in a vexed tone, stated all he knew of the affair, which was little. "Hornette seems to have got crazed too," added he; "but what am I to do? We don't fight duels in England. I can't go and horsewhip him, and if I returned his insults we should be like a pair of men blackguarding each other."

"Decidedly so, avoid all rows," ejaculated Mr. Paramount, with some nervousness; then in a tone of friendliness, which came maybe from the remembrance of his own early struggles against calumny and detraction. "After all, these troubles will pass away; they are only the brambles that tear at every successful man."

Mayrose made no reply. The carriage flashed down silent Whitehall, and the lamp posts seemed to fly on either side of the way like soldiers of an army in rout. He set down Mr. Paramount at the latter's residence, and then rode home, sick at heart with the thought that his troubles were only beginning, not ending, and that possibly they would only terminate after they had heaped upon him ruin and disgrace. As he had foretold to Lady Rosemary—his sin was finding him out.

Mary was sitting up for her husband, as she always did, at no matter what hour he was expected home, and poring over her book of etiquette to wile away the time. As soon as her master's carriage was heard at the door, Mary's maid had orders to light a spirit-lamp, and prepare a cup of chocolate; and Mayrose generally came straight to his wife's dressing-room to take this refreshment, which was welcome enough after an evening's fatigue. This time he went into her room as usual, but instead of greeting her with a kind smile, presented himself with a frown; and for the first time since their marriage he addressed her bitterly. He could not help it; the humiliation he had endured at Sir Ham's hands was too cruel to be borne alone.

"Your father has insulted me this evening in the hearing of Lord Lobby and some other Peers," he said, coldly, without approaching her, but throwing himself into an arm-chair.

Mary sat speechless, and let her book glide to the floor. Her peignoir was drawn round her, her hair was dressed up under a small lace cap; and all this white contrasting with her dark open eyes made them seem twice their size. "My—father—has—insulted—you?" she echoed, with a terrified pause between each word, as if they were making her choke.

"He taunted me with having married you for your money, and with being a mean, pitiful beggar," continued Mayrose, with chilly composure. "He added that he should leave all his fortune away from us, and that I was instigating you to act against him."

"You—instigating me against my father?"

"Yes; and I suppose he will repeat that to you, and teach you to suspect, perhaps to hate me."

Mary shrank as if hurt, then sprang up, darted across the room, and sank at her husband's feet, folding her hands on his lap:—"For God's sake, Freddy, don't look at me in that way. I can stand anything but that. Tell me what it is that is happening to us. People stare at me with aversion, and speak to me ill-naturedly. This evening again at Lady Beaujolais' I heard some whispering when I entered the room. I don't understand it; and these last few days a presentiment has crept on me that some disaster was going to overtake us. Don't conceal anything from me. I am your wife, and if there is any grief troubling you, for pity's sake let me share it."

She spoke in such a harrowing tone of entreaty that he felt a sudden shame

for his harshness. It was far from his wish to cause her pain, and nothing but the exasperation into which he had been thrown could have made him depart from the demeanour of outward tenderness he had hitherto displayed—and had purposed ever to display—towards his wife. He drew her to him, gently stroking her hair and taking her hands within his. But her fingers were icy cold and trembled.

"It is nothing, my dear child," he then murmured, trying, not very successfully, to assume an air of cheerfulness; "only I am afraid you have linked your life to that of a man who has many uphill battles to fight, and may not always win them."

"Oh, what does that matter so long as your love remains to me," she cried, clinging to him and gazing appealingly into his face. "You are all the world to me. Nothing would seem too hard if you were by my side, and let me take my part of all your sorrows. I know I am not your equal in intelligence, but advise me, guide me, and you will see what trouble I will take to learn, and what a good wife I will be to you! Now tell me about this, dear. Is it that horrid loan again? Perhaps we may find some means of appeasing papa together."

"I daresay your father will be sorry for his hastiness when he reflects on it, but meanwhile there is nothing to do but be patient," answered Mayrose, resignedly. And, as his voice had now softened, she nestled her head on his breast, and soon, giving away to the reaction consequent on the over-wrought tension of her nerves, burst into tears as unrestrained as those of a child's.

Mayrose ought to have been touched by the devotion of the poor little thing, whom a single unkind look of his was enough to throw into agonies, but her tears did not move those well-springs of his heart whence love flows. By-and-bye he lulled her to sleep, and watched her pure breathing and the innocent repose of her features, half wondering that he could feel no affection for the sweet young creature in whom God had implanted all the charms and virtues which make women lovable. But the heart is a riddle beyond the ken of reason. All the previous day Mayrose had derived a deep, secret joy from the knowledge that Zellie was not going to marry Lord Hornette, and now, standing by his wife's bedside, it seemed to him that this unavowable solace had made the day's crosses lighter. He was conscious that there was a profanation in allowing these thoughts to intrude on him in such a place and at such an hour. But a full day had not yet elapsed since Zellie's rejection of his old rival had been made known to him, and Sir Ham's insults, coming so soon after this news, had stirred his regrets over his marriage into something like an intensity of repining.

Mayrose did not feel that Zellie's altered position could have any influence on his own life; for under all circumstances he intended remaining faithful to his marriage vow, and to the promise he had given Lady Rosemary never to hint his love to Zellie. But the certainty that Zellie was free, and the intuitive conviction that her engagement had been broken off by her constancy to him, were facts that did more to cheer him under his present trials than all his wife's love and devotion. He could not sleep, but left Mary's chamber and walked noiselessly about his dressing-room, till by-and-bye a stealthy wish crept over him to see Zellie and speak to her, if only for a single moment. He should reveal nothing of his undying attachment to her—he would endeavour to speak to her as if she were no more than a friend—but he said to himself that if he could touch her hand and read in her downcast eyes that she was still true to him, he should have the courage to face any evils that the future might have in store. A little frightened by his own thoughts, he raised the light of the lamp and sat down to try and read; but his mind would not travel with the print, and no wonder; for when a married man once drifts into reflections like these, they lead him over that border-land of duty beyond which every step is a pitfall.

The next day—or rather the same day, for it was then five o'clock in the morning—Lord Beaujolais arrived in Berkeley Square towards mid-day glowing with the importance of a special embassy. There was a great difference between the embassies which Lord Beaujolais undertook on his own account, and those which he discharged, acting by the advice of his wife. In the former cases his lordship was precipitate—talked in "you knows" and "I says," and was generally

so much flustered that he wore yesterday's gloves, possibly feeling by instinct that they were good enough to bungle with ; but Lord Beaujolais primed by his wife was like a man who feels sure of his ground. When he drew up at Mayrose's door, he had a geranium in his button-hole, his straw-coloured gloves were speckless, and his golden beard spread out like a fan under his rosy face defying the breezes of the morning.

"I have just dropped in to say that I've taken my name off the Brummel," he began, airily, and with a cordial shake of the hand. "After Hornette's behavior, it was not decent that I should belong to the club a day longer."

"I am really very much obliged to you, but I should be very sorry to draw you into my quarrels," replied Mayrose, rather touched, nevertheless.

"Oh, it was the only course open to me! My wife saw it in a moment," said the Lord Chamberlain, with sagacity. "You know, women have a great tact in these things. It seems the report of Hornette's doings went to Osborne, and the Queen instantly directed the Prince to withdraw too." (This was not Prince Casino, but the Prince of the Blood.) "He will probably invite himself to dinner with you to mark his disapproval of Hornette's strange conduct."

"I would rather have treated that conduct as the freak of a foolish fellow," rejoined Mayrose, with a shrug, "but I cannot but feel grateful for the Prince's kindness."

"Everybody must feel kindly towards you," answered the Earl, breezily; "and my first impulse was to convene a general meeting to make Hornette apologize or resign. But my wife thought it would not be prudent to fly in the faces of the Drones, and do anything that could get into the papers. On the whole, withdrawal was better, for lots of other fellows will follow us, now that the Prince has resigned, and we can found another club to which the Prince and you will both belong. We'll call it the 'D'Orsay,' and blackball all the Drone and Midge connection, hip and thigh."

"Don't you think clubs rather exceed their mission when men turn them into vehicles for inflicting underhand slights on one another?" asked Mayrose, unenthusiastically.

"Oh, certainly—hem," coughed the Earl, for his wife had not coached him in view of this poser. "But the first slight came from them, you know, and egad, the Drones have had such a long innings in knocking their enemies all over the shop, that I shall be delighted to pill a few under the rose. Of course I won't quarrel with Hornette openly, for old Bumblebeigh can bring down his foot on one's head like a sledge-hammer. But, I say, it's one o'clock—suppose I drive you down to the house," broke off his lordship, wary of evincing too much social valour at one time.

Mayrose accepted, and was whirled away in Lord Beaujolais' phaeton, whose well-picked team, prancing along with all their eight legs off the ground at the same time, seemed to be in unison with the buoyant mood of their master. Soon after her husband had gone, Mary came down with a grim purpose on her little face, ordered her carriage, and drove to Kensington to see her father. But Sir Ham was not at home, and Mary could elicit nothing from her mother as to the possibilities of a reconciliation between her husband and her father. Lady Pennywoddle was all distraught and lackadaisical from having heard her Ham vow with denunciatory gestures that his son-in-law wanted to ruin him. Mary did not ask to see Grace, nor did that young lady show herself during the interview between mother and daughter—indeed, Lady Pennywoddle volunteered the statement that she had gone out shopping, as she believed. When Mary discovered that she could draw nothing but sighs and whimperings half-reproachful from her mother, she started for the House of Commons, resolving to send a note to Sir Ham by an usher, and to have an explanation at any hazards.

Had she simply sent in her card Sir Ham might have scrupled to tell the usher that he declined seeing his own daughter, but the usher could not guess what was in the note, so that the Knight, who feared that his obstinacy might be mollified by Mary's entreaties, returned the answer that he could not leave the House till the debate was over. This reply was brought out to Mary in the public lobby, whither

she had come by herself with her veil drawn down. There was a great crowd of people collected in this lobby, for the debate was to be resumed at two, and strangers up from the country were waylaying their several members to ask them for tickets to the gallery—this place of delight being more than overstocked already. There were squires and provincial attorneys, and ex-M.P.'s who had been unseated for bribery, but whose seven years of disfranchisement were drawing to an end; and sallow-faced parsons and purple-cheeked farmers; and among all these jostling persons the usher had to push his way to bring the Knight's message to Mary. When Mary received the snub she stood for a moment irresolute; but hearing so many persons whisper about getting seats, she thought she might endeavour to obtain a place in the ladies' gallery, under the naive impression that she could thence survey her father, and run down to meet him when he should come out. A member whom she knew was passing at that moment. She stopped him, lifting her veil, and proffered her request.

Now ladies are supposed to have their names drawn by lot when they desire to witness a debate; and on important occasions one lady will get herself proposed by several members, and be drawn for under half a dozen different names to increase her chances. But for the wife of a Peer and Cabinet Minister admission can generally be procured through the Speaker without this formality. Either some lady who was entitled to a seat has not come, or some other lady, not finding the proceedings funny, has retired after the first quarter of an hour; or, failing this, admission is given in the hope—not always realized—that the ladies upstairs will kindly squeeze themselves a little to make room for the intruder. In short, for a "Grand Dame" a place is always found somewhere.

So the member—he was young and commercial—having scuttled away for a moment, returned hat in hand; and, proud to be seen playing cavalier to a pretty peeress, escorted Mary down a maze of passages till they reached a succession of staircases, and at length one narrow staircase, covered with a mulberry-coloured carpet, which led straight to the Ladies' Gallery. A crimson curtain protected the entrance of this sanctum, and the young and commercial M. P., having drawn it aside, Mary found herself in a sort of overgrown pew, in which about fifty members of her sex were enjoying themselves with fans, and staring through an iron grating at some six hundred legislators of the nobler gender, lolling decorously on the back seats below, with their hats on. The seats were arranged in blocks, and Mary's attendant conducted her to the central block, reserved to Mr. Speaker's nominees, and to the front row in that block. Every seat was filled, and at sight of a new comer most of the fair occupants spread out their dresses, to intimate that there was not room for a mouse, so that there was a moment's doubt as to whether Mary would not have to turn back. But Heaven be praised that we are a courteous people! for a fat lady, with about a pound of flowers in her bonnet, having overheard the young and commercial M. P. ejaculate, wretchedly, "Dear me, your ladyship, what shall we do?" instantly tugged at the tail of his coat:

"Mr. Jipples, if her ladyship would like my seat, she's welcome. My husband brought me to hear him speak; but they tell me that the 'Ouse will go on sitting till to-morrow morning, and that my husband won't speak maybe till midnight; and I can't wait all that weary while, having scarce broke my fast this morning."

"I am sure it's most obliging of you, Mrs. Sholefiddle, answered the confused Mr. Jipples; and sinking his voice to a whisper, he added, "It's for Lady Mayrose."

"Lady Mayrose!" echoed the wife of the member for Billingsgate, while Mary passed her with a bow and a few words of thanks. But as Mrs. Sholefiddle's exclamation was uttered in a tone of astonishment and aloud, it caught the ears of several other ladies, who communicated it to others farther off, so that in a moment Mary found a score of double eye-glasses turned in her direction, as if every-body present knew her, and regarded her as an object of curiosity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ADJOURNED DEBATE.

The ladies in the House of Commons gallery regarded Mary as an object of curiosity, because just before her arrival the names of her father and her husband had been alluded to in very audible tones by one of the spectatresses—Lady Belladonna, or Albert Drone.

Talkative Lady Belladonna, who knew everything, and seldom cared to keep secret what things she knew, had been retailing in a confidential falsetto to Mrs. Coney Bussle, who sat near her, the story of Sir Ham's quarrel with his son-in-law, such as she had heard it from some one who got it from Colonel Dandelion, the "Whip." "You could have knocked the Colonel down with a feather, my dear, when that city man came to tell him that he was going to speak against the Bill. It seems he and his son-in-law must have fallen out about the number of shares which Lord Mayrose was to have in the Loan."

"I suppose Lord Mayrose wanted them all," remarked Mrs. Coney Bussle, in the well-modulated tone of a fog-whistle.

"There's no saying, my dear; at all events the city man was almost foaming at the mouth, but you know a member can't speak unless he arranges with the 'Whip,' for it's the Whips who draw up the lists for the Speaker, and if a member has not been written down beforehand, the Speaker does not let his eye fall on him. So the city man came, as I said, to the Colonel, but it appears there's a plot afoot to prevent him from speaking, lest he should abuse Lord Mayrose in public, which would, of course, be a great scandal."

"I think the plot to hinder Sir Ham from speaking out his mind is a greater scandal still," rejoined Mrs. Coney Bussle, still screeching.

"That may be, my dear, but there are always plots in Parliament," answered honest Lady Belladonna, with a recollection, perhaps, of Lord Balbie Drone having occasionally joined in such necessary manœuvres. "Sir Ham is down to speak among the last, but it appears the Colonel will contrive to draw him out of the House on some pretext, so that he may lose his turn, and they hope the debate will be concluded this evening, because the Opposition are afraid to speak much against the Bill, and the Ministerialists want to get it into Committee as quickly as possible."

A lady who was sitting some places removed from Lady Belladonna had been listening very attentively to her words, and after the above conversation she rose and glided out of the gallery into the ladies' refreshment room, where she wrote a hurried note, and begged the attendant to have it carried to Sir Ham Pennywoddle. This lady was Grace Marvell. It was during her short absence from the Gallery that Mary entered, and consequently Grace did not see her. When she returned she found her place usurped by a lady who had presumed that she was not coming back; and so, not caring to make a fuss in claiming her own, she settled down into a seat further off, and behind Mary, of whose arrival she continued to be unaware.

But Lady Belladonna, hearing Lady Mayrose's name, instantly rose from her own seat and bustled to get beside her. The good lady never cold-shouldered an old friend until such time as the old friend might have become harmless; for she had known some disquieting resurrections of persons who had been considered socially dead and buried, and had noticed that retribution terribly swift and stern occasionally befell the grave-diggers. Mayrose had been her husband's lieutenant and Mary her protégée—she saw no reason for deserting them so long as they were still powerful and rich and likely to triumph over their foes. So, huddling up her fan, opera-glass, order paper, and smelling-bottle, like an apronful of eggs, she approached Mary and easily effected a change of seats with Mary's neighbour. Then, after shaking hands, said, in a motherly tone lower pitched than usual: "My dear, what a sad business this enmity is between your husband and our family! Not that I approve Hornette's conduct; for though he leads us all, I think he is often very warm-tempered, and was so towards your husband."

"Why, what has Lord Hornette done?" enquired Mary, innocently, for she had heard nothing of the Brummel affair, besides which she was abstracted from trying to recognize her father among the mass of heads below.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lady Belladonna, "hasn't your husband told you, my dear? Well, perhaps he didn't want you to know; and to be sure it is a slight matter, for these political feuds never last, and that is why I am always opposed to seeing bitterness infused into them. There was Mr. O'Shillelaghan, who called himself The O'Shillelaghan of the Swamps, and when he voted against the Tweedledum Ministry, on the Bog Oak question, Lord Poldoody charged him with being a turncoat, and spoke violently about him at Boodle's. But I said to Poldoody, 'My dear lord, pray go and shake hands with that man, for there's no knowing what he may come to.' This was just a month before the O'Shillelaghan made his peace with the Ministry and got the Chief-Justiceship of the Irish Divorce Court; and next year, when the poor Earl's Divorce Case came on for hearing, the O'Shillelaghan remembered Poldoody and summed up so atrociously against him that he couldn't get a verdict, and his wife is now flaunting about the Continent on the allowance of £4,000 a year—which shows the imprudence of being too energetic in political questions. I told Hornette that story this very morning."

"I see Lord Hornette is going to speak now," said Mary, whose attention to the proceedings underneath the grating had prevented her from heeding Lady Belladonna's flood of tattle; and hereon Lord Balbie's wife lapsed mute and brought an opera-glass to bear upon her high and mighty nephew.

The heir of the Drones rose below the gangway with his face turned to the chair, and broke into a cantering discourse, with the dry haughtiness natural to him. He was not a brilliant orator, but he was bold and rasping, and when angry, never stammered. Feeling a noble contempt for the mob of manufacturers and younger sons who sat round him, he could experience no nervousness, but spoke straight on, cracking his indignant adjectives about him like so many weals with a riding-whip. This was not his maiden speech, and the House hearkened to him with considerable respect, as we always do to those who care not a doit whether we hearken to them or not; there was indeed something chivalrous in the attitude of this heir to a great English House who stood up manfully for principles which most of his hearers would have defended too had they felt more secure of their seats. Mr. Paramount turned rather uneasily on his bench when some of Lord Hornette's most scornful sarcasms thwacked upon his ears, and on the same occasions Mr. Paradise's earnest features smiled placidly, for politics is an occupation which stimulates the fine feelings of brotherhood. But Lord Hornette had soon finished lashing Mr. Paramount; and, plunging into a diatribe against the other members of the Government who were supporting this Bill, he alluded with an incredible outburst of disdain and irony to one whom all the House divined to be the Secretary for Africa. He had not proceeded far, however, before a mild gentleman rose from the opposite benches, and baring his head, called Mr. Speaker's attention to a point of order.

This mild and orderly gentleman was Mr. Jipples. Knowing that Lady Mayrose was in the Gallery, he was too compassionate and gallant to allow her husband to be abused in her hearing; and the fact that he sat on Mr. Paradise's side, and was there *ex officio* an opponent of the Ministry, made no difference in the quietly warm terms of his protest against Lord Hornette's virulence. It may be added that this protest did Mr. Jipples much good in his career, for it has always been remembered of him since that he was an honourable member who advocated moderation in debate regardless of party ties. Indeed, as one event is often enough to impress its stamp on the whole of a man's life, the fact that Mr. Jipples had fortuitously taken Lady Mayrose into the Gallery, and had by that circumstance been led into recording a protest, has induced him from that date to record many another protest; and nowadays, when an honourable gentleman drops an adjective a trifle too expressive, it is always Mr. Jipples who rises to inquire whether the said adjective is strictly Parliamentary.

Baring his well-combed head, then, Mr. Jipples asked of Mr. Speaker whether it was in order "for a noble lord to allude to another noble and absent lord in

language of opprobrium? Whatever might be the questions which divided honourable members, he must say, for his part, that there was but one opinion as to the integrity—he might say the unimpeachable integrity—of all the right honourable gentlemen who guided or had ever guided Her Majesty's Governments, and this no matter in what House they sat, nor what office they held, or were ever likely to hold." Loud Ministerial cheers, and some less loud from the Opposition, hailed this brave little sortie, and while Mr. Jipples was putting on his hat, Mr. Speaker confessed that the noble lord the member for North Hiveshire had somewhat transgressed those bonds which he hoped, and ever should hope, would be maintained for the courtesy of parliamentary debates. Lord Hornette scowled, and bit his lips; but as it is not good to kick against Mr. Speaker, he stood rebuked, and the remainder of his speech was spasmodic, like a train that has been knocked off its track.

Mary listened to the speech, to Mr. Jipples' protest, and to the rebuke from the chair, but if Lady Belladonna had not kindly informed her that Mayrose was being pulled to pieces she would not have suspected it; for her eyes were still roaming anxiously in search of her father. It was difficult to descry him among the sitting crowd, which, seen from above, looks like a forest of beaver hats with boots thrown in for relief, but at last she perceived him taking a note from one of the pages who bring glasses of cold water to honourable gentlemen whose throats want moistening. It was in the midst of the Jipples incident. Sir Ham having read the note caught up some papers beside him, threw a glance and a nod towards the Ladies' Gallery, and waddled towards the door. Then Lady Belladonna, who had watched these things through her glasses, ejaculated:

"There, my dear, Colonel Dandelion has succeeded in drawing your father out of the House to prevent him speaking against the Bill, and really I am glad of it, for when near relations take opposite views on a question and grow warm over them, it never looks quite proper. But what a clever man that Colonel is my dear! He has not his equal for managing a 'count-out'; and they say that when Mr. Boreham was summoned away to the Highlands by telegram on the very day when he was to have introduced his disagreeable Private Bill to limit the number of beadies at Somerset House, it was the Colonel who had arranged the despatch by circumventing Mrs. Boreham, and making her telegraph that her mother was dying. Poor Mr. Boreham was never very fond of his mother-in-law, you know, and that is why he posted off in such haste, hoping to arrive just as her funeral was being arranged; but she had nothing but a cold, and I am afraid he has never quite recovered from the disappointment."

"But why should Colonel Dandelion want to get my father away?" asked Mary, to whom all this was no clearer than ink in a bottle, and who had half risen from her seat to see whither her father went.

"Why, my dear, your husband tells you nothing, then!" exclaimed Lady Belladonna in genuine surprise. "Perhaps it was wrong of me to speak under the circumstances, but you see I thought everyone knew that Lord Mayrose and your father had had a difference, and that your father had threatened to make a long speech."

Mary felt ready to cry at being so little cognizant of what appeared to be common talk. What sort of speech could her father have threatened to make—and why had her husband told her nothing about it? She would have liked to go down stairs and try to rejoin Sir Ham, but she was aware by this time she could never find her way. She sat in misery, taking no interest in the speeches, and repenting of having come to the gallery at all; she even wondered whether some rule did not compel her to sit out the whole debate without going home to dinner. But her wretched inaction did not last long. In a few minutes she became conscious that the curtain over the entrance to the gallery was being pulled aside, and, turning round, saw her father in the doorway. He was peering about for somebody, and Mary thought at first it must be for her; but suddenly a form rose undulating from a neighboring bench, and Mary recognized Grace Marvell. A cold numbness fell upon her at the thought that her father, who had refused to move for her sake, had come up to see Grace; and at this other thought that Grace had been sitting almost

beside her undetected. But without a moment's deliberation she stood up and followed them both, stumbling rather than running.

Sir Ham and Grace had gone into the well-furnished little room where members come up and refresh the ladies whom they know with tea or ices; and where they often say things much more instructive and amusing than they do in their public speeches. Mary had not seen the door close behind them, but she instinctively opened the first door that came to hand, and entered just as Grace—whose back was turned to her—was saying excitedly, "Sir Ham, I hear that there is an intrigue to wile you out of the House by some false news. Whatever note or message you may receive, unless it be from me, mind you do not leave your place until you have spoken. They are growing afraid of you, that is the fact, and you will obtain everything you desire by remaining firm."

Sir Ham, scratching his head in a puzzled way, was going to reply, but he gave a start, and motioned in alarm to Grace to be silent, for Mary was in the room. Grace had turned sharply round on hearing the door-handle move, but the handle had only creaked when Mary had loosened her hold of it, and was already across the threshold. With her face flushing and her little frame all trembling from indignation, Mary confronted Grace, and stood during a few seconds glaring at her. Then she cried:—"So it's you, Grace—you false-hearted, wicked girl, who are deceiving my father, and setting him against his daughter!"

Grace recoiled under the suddenness of the shock. A deep blush and a stony pallor overspread her face in quick succession and she remained for a moment bereft of speech; but only for a moment, for it was not the time to lose heart, but to brazen it out.

"I am setting your father against no one, Mary," she answered, with an attempt at composure. "I am only giving him the advice which an affectionate daughter—or which you yourself, in fact—ought to give him."

"That is a sinful lie," cried Mary, running to her father, and clinging to his arm. "Papa, do you see that girl?" she added, pointing her finger at Grace with a denouncing gesture. "She wants to get your money from you in order to marry Prince Casino!"

This time Grace lost countenance. The charge came upon her with the abruptness of a loaded pistol held to her forehead, and she knew not what might come next—so trembled in conscience-stricken terror. But far more piteous was the effect of this pistol display on Sir Ham. He gave a sort of jump, and the blood flowed to his neck and cheeks in an apoplectic tide, while his eyes looked as if they would burst out of his head as they fastened themselves with scared interrogation on Grace. "Hold your tongue, Mary," he gasped, with a movement as if he would strike her. "Grace, say summat," he stammered, wildly.

"She has nothing to say, papa," raved Mary, placing one arm across her father's chest, and continuing to point the other hand at Grace's frightened face. "She and that Italian have entered into a plot to rob you. I don't know what they have said to blind you, but Grace almost confessed to me that she was in love with the Prince, and as neither of them has a penny, they are ready to ruin and disgrace you for their own profit."

"Don't believe that, Sir Ham," panted Grace, who had now recovered so far as to see that it was a life-and-death game she was playing, and who looked wondrously beautiful as she turned with all the splendour of wrath upon her accuser. "Mary calumniates me because she knows it is her own husband who has designs upon your fortune, and would thwart you from everything which he fears may diminish his heritage."

The poor City Knight stood irresolute. The anguish of doubt had brought huge drops to his brow; and the jealousy which now for the first time gnawed his heart wrung his lips with a contortion horribly wry. But Grace's voice exercised a spell over him which he could not break—the less so as he had no wish to break it—so once more he passionately endeavored to thrust Mary away from him, and mumbled: "I believe you Grace, not Mary; I know we've enemies, and it's your husband, Mary, wants to keep me from making profit out of them Rio-Brigandians;

and I wish I hadn't married you to him, but I used to think he was a well-behaved young man—which he isn't."

But Mary was not to be pushed away from her father. "Enemies!" she exclaimed, in wild reproach. "You have no enemies, papa, but that girl. I see it all now—her fiendish treachery, her crafty plot to draw you into her meshes by fawning flatteries and by poisoning your mind against all who suspected her. She must have laid her plans ever since I brought her into our house; and, oh that God would send some proof to open your eyes like mine."

Such angry prayers are not always heard, but they sometimes are. There was at this moment a knock at the door, and a messenger came in with evident astonishment to see such signs of fluster on the faces of the three fashionable occupants of the room. He held a note in his hand, and enquired, apologetically:—"Is there a lady of the name of Miss Marvell here? A gentleman, Prince Casino I think the name was, asked me to bring up this note, and ask for an answer."

Grace became paler than snow, and clutching at the back of a chair to keep herself from falling, held out a hand for the note, but with a rapid dart Mary forestalled her, and seized it. She motioned to the surprised messenger to withdraw, then holding the letter out of Grace's reach, cried in a voice that quavered with exultation: "If what I have said is not true, you can have no objection to letting my father see the contents of this note. You say you are like a daughter to him!"

"Sir Ham shall see the note, but not you," faltered Grace, who would have wrested the note from Mary by main force had she dared, but who, being restrained by Mary's father, looked near fainting.

"Very well, then, let my father read it," agreed Mary; and she handed the note to Sir Ham.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHALLENGE IN THE OLD STYLE.

The note which Mary handed to her father looked a lover's note all over. It was in a white triangular envelope, with a light blue border, and had in guise of a seal a coloured pansy, surmounted by a Prince's coronet. English people use such envelopes in correspondence with persons towards whom they stand in most affectionate relationship: none but an Italian would have thought of employing one in writing to a young lady whom he could compromise. Sir Ham turned the gallant trifle over in his fingers with a mute stupor; but he did not even cast an apologetic glance at Grace before opening it, so distracting was the jealousy which now possessed him.

He broke the seal, but as soon as he had set eyes on the paper, stared with a blank expression, "It's writ in a furrin' tongue," said he helplessly.

Grace, mustering up a remnant of fortitude, threw an appealing look at the Knight, and volunteered to read the note and translate it faithfully; but jealousy is the one passion against which appealing looks avail nothing. Sir Ham passed the letter nervously to Mary, whom but a minute before he had ordered out of his sight and Mary rapidly scanned, and—thanks to her Brighton school training—was enabled to read aloud what follows:—

"CARISSIMA SIGNORINA,

"Son venuto in grande prescia a dirvi che e meglio che il Cavaliere Pennywoddle non parla sta sera. Sono stato avvertito che un discorso sarebbe pernizioso a la causa che abbiamo tutti due a cuore. Conto a la vostra buona assistenza in questo affare, e se potete darmi cinque minuti di conversazione, vi spieghero delle ragioni che non posso mettere in una lettera.

"Baciando vostre mani belle,

"Io sono,

"Signorina,

"Vostro umillimo adoratore,

"RUBINO DEI CASINO."

"He calls her 'darling,' says you must not speak to-night because it would do harm to the affair which 'they both have at heart'—that is the Loan, I suppose—and concludes by kissing her pretty hands and signing himself 'the humblest of her adorers'—those are his very words!" exclaimed Mary, exultingly.

"'Carissima' doesn't mean 'darling.' You know Italian use superlatives to everybody," expostulated Grace, whose brow burned as if she had been struck.

"They use superlatives, but they don't kiss everybody's hand," rejoined Mary, with withering contempt; and this appeared to be the opinion of Sir Ham, whose face had become cadaverous, and whose fists were clenched ragefully.

There were no signs of relenting in his expression at that moment—nothing but anger and the violent sorrowing amazement of a duped old man. Seeing it would be useless to attempt any vindication of herself in face of the knight's present mood, and with the letter seeming to bear clear evidence of her guilt, Grace had recourse to an attitude of offended dignity. She released her hold of the chair to which she had clung for support, abruptly shook off her faintness, and held out her hand for the note.

"Will you give me my letter, please, Lady Mayrose? and, Sir Ham, after what has occurred, you will not suppose that I can remain in your house a day longer. I had hoped that my efforts to requite your past kindness by showing you all the devotion in my power would have been better appreciated; but I ought to have been prepared for calumny. I will only add that you cannot now withdraw from the Loan, and that if you wish to make it profitable, you will do well to beware of the advice of people whose objects are more selfish than mine."

With this parting shot she swept towards the door. If she had hoped by her threat of leaving Sir Ham's house to cause him a last twinge, she effected her purpose, for the knight uttered a moan and stammered something. But Mary was at hand to protect him against his own weakness. So Grace went out unchecked, and five minutes afterwards Mary and her father descended the staircase together, he leaning on her arm, with a lost look in his puzzled gooseberry eyes, and appearing to having aged ten years in as many minutes. When they reached Palace Yard, Mary dismissed her father's brougham and made him get into her own carriage; then she drove him to Berkeley Square with the intention of keeping him there till Mayrose should come in, and then bring about his reconciliation with her husband.

But meanwhile the gallant Prince Casino, unconscious author of the scene in the tea-room, was anxiously pacing about the small yard in front of Mr. Speaker's residence—which is the yard nearest to the Ladies' Gallery—and waiting for Grace. It was Colonel Dandelion's good management that had brought the Prince to come here and lay a veto on Sir Ham's speaking. The astute "whip," casting about for a means of preventing the member from Hivesworth from assailing the Cabinet in which his son-in-law sat, had bethought him that the Italian Prince, being by all accounts much interested in the Loan, would have the most influence over Sir Ham; and accordingly he had communicated with him, giving the Prince to understand that if Sir Ham made himself unpleasant to Government, all chance of Rio-Brigande's recognition would be at an end. He did not commit himself to the converse of this proposition—namely, that if Sir Ham made himself pleasant, Rio-Brigande would be recognized; but Prince Casino had great faith in the *sub auditi* promises of negotiation; beside which, it was unadvisable on all grounds that Sir Ham should make himself unpleasant.

So the well-oiled Prince paced about the yard in patent leather boots, very light trousers, and flesh-coloured gloves; and every now and then he paused, softly humming "La donna e mobile," and consulting a jewelled watch scarcely bigger than a shilling. The messenger had assured him that his note had been delivered into Miss Marvell's own hands, and that Sir Ham Pennywoddle had been present; but the Prince drew no uneasy inferences from Sir Ham's presence, because in the first place the latter could not read Italian, and in the next, because the messenger had not said—being unaware of the fact—that the second lady was Lady Mayrose. After waiting half an hour, therefore, the Prince began to wonder at Grace's non-appearance, and was on the point of starting another messenger when he was con-

fronted by the man whom, under actual circumstances, he was least desirous of meeting—that is, Mayrose himself.

Mayrose approached the Prince with quick steps, as if he had been aware that he should find him in this yard, bowed to him, and said, peremptorily, "Prince, I want to have a few words with you."

Now the Prince did not like our friend's tone, nor had he any reason to. Instead of going into the House of Commons to hear Lord Hornette speak, Mayrose had been spending a couple of hours in interrogating divers peers and Ministerial friends as to the sources whence they had heard of his being mixed up with the Loan; and the result of these interrogations was that he had resolved to take summary action. The rumours against him, fanned by political animosity, and by the babblesome tongues of the Boudoir Cabal, were growing too serious to be overlooked; and Mayrose had come to see that, after all, the way to contradict these slanders was not by folding his arms and letting people talk. It had been easy for him to ascertain that Prince Casino had taken his name in vain, and accordingly it was with the Prince that he determined to begin. However, just as he was going into the writing room to despatch a note of appointment to the Italian, he was run after by Colonel Dandelion, who briefly explained to him how he thought he should be able to restrain Sir Ham from "making a duffer of himself." The Colonel added that he had just seen Prince Casino, who had sent up a few lines to somebody in the Ladies' Gallery having a great hold over Sir Ham, and he concluded this somebody was Sir Ham's wife. Mayrose, concluding differently, set off at once in quest of the Prince, and that is how he came to surprise him in the small yard.

"A few words with you, Prince," he repeated in the tone which English noblemen can assume when they are angry, and which made the Italian's ears feel hot; "I hear you have been bandying my name about society in connection with a disreputable Loan—you well know that I have no part in that affair."

"Milord, I deed not deenk to offend you. I cannot remember using your name," stammered the Italian, his pronunciation running altogether wild from the suddenness of his emotion.

"You appear to have told Lord Hornette in the dining-room of the 'Brum-mel,' and in hearing of several gentlemen, whom I can produce as witnesses, that I was abetting your schemes, and expected to derive profit from them. In doing this you laid yourself open to a criminal prosecution, and I have now to remind you that, as a Secretary of State, I can sign a warrant for your arrest, and have you taken to Newgate."

This time the Prince's rosy face turned to the joyless hue of a suet dumpling, and he felt as though his shiny boots had been made much too small for him. The powers of Ministers in Continental countries are unpleasantly extensive, and it took Rubino dei Casino a good minute before he could recollect that the *Habeas Corpus* of England sheds its protection over foreigners and natives alike. "You joke, milord," he muttered, yet very gulpingly, as he called this to mind.

"I am so far from joking that I am going to remind you of something else," continued Mayrose, quietly. "You have undertaken, from motives best known to yourself, to make my father-in-law issue a loan of four millions for a bankrupt country. In the present state of our laws it is unfortunately not in the power of Government to prohibit this swindle—yes, swindle is the only word by which I can characterize it—but we can publish in the *London Gazette* a statement of the political and financial condition of Rio-Brigande, and warn the public to embark no capital in a country which has repudiated three loans already."

"Ah, Dio, milord, you would not do that!" ejaculated the Prince, in great terror. "You would wholly ruin the Loan, and, vat is more, ruin Sir Penny-woddle; for he has signed all the papers, and the loan will be issued next week. If the public do not buy the scrip, your respected father-in-law will have to pay the entire money out of his own pocket and become bankrupt. Dat is vat he will become."

"I am sorry for it; but I have to think of the public whom your prospectuses will dupe, before considering my father-in-law," answered Mayrose drily. "This matter, however, is not one on which I require your advice. What I have to

demand of you is that you shall come with me at once and retract, in the presence of Lord Hornette, the preposterous aspersions you have cast on me, failing which, I shall this very evening instruct my solicitor to prosecute you for slander and conspiracy. And, mind, I would carry such an affair through against you, if it cost me twenty thousand pounds!"

The Italian gave a slight shiver, and his countenance was a study. He and Mayrose were standing in the centre of the small, dark yard, with grey walls towering high above them, and showing a glimpse of blue sky as small as if seen from the bottom of a well. They had not stirred since their dialogue had commenced, and the Italian now looked as if he were rooted to the gutta percha flooring. He evinced no disposition whatever to obey Mayrose's order—indeed, he shifted his polished leather boots, and grinned a supplication, half-fawning, half-bumptious. But Mayrose threw him a glance that wiped away his grins like a spoonful of vinegar, and with an imperative jerk of the hand, said: "Come, sir, no nonsense; follow me immediately."

The Prince followed, and assuredly no whipped cur ever cut such a figure as this startled Italian, but an hour before the most enchanting foreigner in all London. He could not realize what had befallen him. That any Minister—that any nobleman on earth—should prefer the interests of that stupid concrete mass called the public to his own interests—to the honour and comfort of a wealthy father-in-law—seemed to him incredible. He had heard of British eccentricity, but had found little of it in monetary concerns; and of a truth this beat anything he had read of, even in books. If he could have suspected things would have turned out like this, he would have had nothing to do with the Loan. But how could he have suspected it? In any other country, a rich capitalist, a pretty woman, a confiding public, and a powerful Minister related to the capitalist and having every reason to keep on good terms with him, would have formed the factors of a quotient out of which a clever man in league with the pretty woman might have cleared any amount of gain. Prince Rubino dei Casini was aghast to think that Nature having in a freak fabricated an incorruptible Minister, he, of all persons, should have been the man to light upon him; and that, further, this Minister was now putting forth his might to belabour him. By the time he had reached the members' private lobby, having threaded a labyrinth of gorgeously-coloured painted corridors unknown to him, he passed his flesh coloured gloves over his eyes, thinking he must be in a dream.

But his eyes were soon opened. In the lobby Mayrose was hurriedly accosted by several noblemen and by little Sir Tito Tumb, who apprised him of the abuse in Lord Hornette's speech, of the Jipple protest, of the Speaker's rebuke, and of the intense excitement into which everybody had been thrown. Mayrose did not listen, but begged Sir Tito to ask Lord Hornette and Lord Balbie Drone to come for a moment into one of the private rooms, where he would have something of importance to say to them. He added the request that Sir Tito himself should come with them to witness the interview, and, perceiving Lord Beaujolais, beckoned to him, and enlisted him as second witness.

Sir Tito Tumb, who had been struck by the hang-dog appearance of Prince Casino, and suspected that something queer was brewing, strutted off on his mission; and it transpired later that Lord Hornette had made a difficulty about answering Mayrose's summons; but, yielding to persuasion or curiosity, he came at last, escorted by his uncle, on whom, by the way, was to devolve the responsibility of dividing the House on the Suffrage Bill, to the old tune "that this Bill be read a second time this day six months."

Mayrose had betaken himself to one of those private rooms of which there are several for the accommodation of M. P's and Peers; and where one can rely on being alone for at least a few minutes—that is, till some Irishman opens the door, looks round, and begs pardon. Lord Hornette walked in composedly, lifted his hat to Mayrose, as if he had never seen him before, and stood, with a supercilious stare, waiting. But Mayrose was not inclined to be pompous or formal with this old schoolfellow, who, he thought, was making a fool of himself, and so said:—

"Hornette, Prince Casino made you some statements the other day which he is going to retract."

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"Yes, *mon cher* Hornette, stammered the Italian, crimson with humiliation, yet with the graceful impudence which never quite deserts his countrymen when they have been up to a dog's trick, and are having their noses rubbed in the consequences. "*Mon cher* I told you that milord Mayrose was going to get Rio-Brigande recognized for Sir Pennywoddle, and that he would have shares in the Loan. It is a mistake."

"He tells you so, Cass, but I don't believe him," was Lord Hornette's careless answer.

The right honourable company present started, and little Sir Tito, who was wearing a blue neckerchief with white spots, tugged at the same in his amazement, and untied it.

"Come, come, since Mayrose assures you of it on his word of honour," interposed Lord Beaujolais, not a little disgusted ; and worthy Lord Balbie, too, glancing down at his boots—which were shockingly bad boots—mumbled something about this being "inconsiderate."

"I have expressed my opinion," rejoined Lord Hornette, drumming coldly on the back of a chair, "and nothing that Prince Casino can say will make me alter it."

"You mean to say, then, that you give the lie to my word of honour?" inquired Mayrose, grown livid.

"I do," replied Lord Hornette, with all the contempt he could infuse into words.

If they had been in the country—anywhere, indeed, but in the House of Parliament—Mayrose would have knocked him down. As it was, Lord Beaujolais, who feared mischief from the impulsive step forward which Mayrose made, interposed with outspread arms. Mayrose, to restrain himself, plunged a hand in the breast of his coat, and did so with such violence, that his glove was torn from the thumb to the wrist against a waistcoat button.

"You are either a dolt or a vicious character, Hornette," he said, trying to contain his anger ; "but in any case I now warn you, in the presence of these gentlemen, that if you slander me again, you will do so at your peril. I don't know what infatuation has possessed you of late, but you have been as full of scandal and mischief as an old woman, and, as accident has placed you in a position where you have power to do harm, it is time you should be brought to your senses."

"Not by you, I suppose ?" retorted the Earl, with a derisive laugh.

"By me," answered Mayrose, fast losing his temper ; "and since you seem disposed to defy me, I tell you now that, unless I receive an apology from you, I shall hold you answerable for what you have already said and done. I cannot fight you so long as I am in office, nor can I resign until the Session is over, for I have public work to do ; but at the end of the Session you shall beg my pardon, or I will resign and meet you in France."

An expression of exultation and hate passed over Lord Hornette's sallow features, clearing all the frowns from them.

"You will meet me in France, Mayrose ? That is a promise you give me—in the sight of Lord Beaujolais and Sir Tito Tumb."

"No promise ; nothing of the sort. What stuff and nonsense !" exclaimed little Sir Tito, retying his neckerchief, in consternation, and Lord Beaujolais cried in a flutter : "A duel—fiddlesticks ? just shake hands and have an end of this bosh. Here, Mayrose, put out your hand—hang it."

"It's a promise ; for I have had enough of these cowardly attacks," ejaculated Mayrose, pushing back Lord Beaujolais, and letting his indignation get the control of him ; "you hear what I have said, Hornette—I consider you have disgraced yourself ; and Beaujolais and you, Sir Tito, I rely on your honour not to let anything of this interview get abroad."

"That is better than I expected," said Lord Hornette, still in a hostile tone, but this time without contempt ; "There is something more between us, Mayrose, than these trumpery money matters, about which I care not a rush. From this time I shall say nothing more about you ; only, by this day six weeks, one or other of us will be past talking about."

With these grandiloquent words Lord Hornette strode out of the room, and by-and-bye sat down to dine with a much better appetite than he had enjoyed for some days. He even made a five hundred guineas bet with his brother about the Goodwood, though he hated bets; and at the proper time voted in the minority against the Suffrage Bill with a fairly cheerful face. Let it be mentioned for the guidance of historians that the division on the second reading of this great Bill took place at 8:20 in the morning, and that by 500 votes to 75 the House of Commons decided to confer the right of voting on every male and female subject of Her Majesty having attained the age of twenty-one without suffering imprisonment or penal servitude.

As for Mayrose, he walked away with Lord Beaujolais and Sir Tito Tumb, both plaintively upbraiding him for having courted such an outlandish thing as a duel. Mayrose himself felt that he had been hasty, but he did not think the duel would ever come off, for he reasoned that when Lord Hornette discovered for certain that he had had nothing to do with the Loan, that upright though cantankerous Earl would have the manliness to apologise. If, however, it were fated that he should meet Lord Hornette, Mayrose was just then in such a mood that he would have shot a bullet with pleasure through the head of the man who had prevented him from marrying Zellie Carol.

He soon left his two friends, and sought for his precious father-in-law; but learning that he had left the House of Commons, went home to dinner, deferring conversation with Sir Ham till later in the evening; for he was resolved to dispose of the knight as he had disposed of Lord Hornette and the Prince. Mayrose had been quite in earnest in his threat about the *London Gazette*, and he was also determined to have his alleged connection with the Loan denied in Parliament. This could easily be done by arranging that a friendly peer and an M.P. should each ask in their respective Houses whether it was the intention of the Government to recognize Rio-Brigande, and a pair of Mayrose's colleagues would emphatically answer that the Cabinet had come to a unanimous decision (laying stress on the *unanimous*) not to recognise the bankrupt and revolutionary State in question.

In all this Mayrose was actuated by the sincere belief that the Loan was an absurdity and a swindle; but there is no denying that the thought that he was trying to blast a speculation in which Sir Ham had probably already embarked his fortune without possibility of retreat, caused him some inward twinges. He had married Mary for money, and chiefly to get back the Springfield estates which his father had. But those estates were still in Sir Ham's possession—Mary's dower having consisted of cash and Oyster-Shell Shares—and in running counter to Sir Ham's interests Mayrose was therefore jeopardising his own, and doing a magnanimous thing by no means common in these years of grace.

So he arrived home, brooding over all this; but, as soon as he was in, Mary ran down to meet him, and exclaimed with wifely joy:—"Oh, Freddy, dear, papa is here in the library! I have been speaking to him, and he is going to make it up with you; but you won't mind, dearest, telling him that you are sorry if you said anything to hurt him, for he is so unhappy?"

"Certainly, my dear child," said Mayrose, much relieved, and wondering whether, after all, this accursed business could not be got rid of somehow; and he allowed his wife to lead him into the library.

But lo! in the library there was no Sir Ham. Astonished, they looked for him in the dining-room, but he was not there. They sought him under the sofa, and called his name in the passages, but there came no reply. Poor Mary was beside herself.

"Oh dear, dear! this is too bad," she wailed. "Papa told me that he wanted to write a letter, and I left him here whilst I went up to change my dress."

This was correct enough; but finding himself alone in the library, Sir Ham had slunk out of the house.

CHAPTER XX.

"TILL DEATH US DO PART."

Sir Ham had slunk home because he was but feeble flesh and blood, not steel. He had given the whole of his old simple foolish heart to Grace Marvell, and her hold of it was not one that could be loosened by mere accusations, however well substantiated. Indeed, what does substantiation matter in such cases? When the lover is a doting old man, the girl's cause is won, though the entire world conspire to prove her guilty. If she defends herself, her lover will believe her rather than thousands of contrary oaths; if she cannot defend herself, then he will, out of his blind passion, forge hundreds of excuses that will absolve her at least in his eyes.

This is what Sir Ham had been doing from the moment when Grace had announced that she should leave his house. He could not bear that she should leave him. Whilst alone with his daughter Mary, and listening to the revilings she poured forth with unstinting tongue against Grace, the thought that Grace might all this while be packing up or going was a searing torture to the knight, and at length proved too much for his fortitude. He did not know by what name to call the sentiment that attached him to this girl; all he knew was that she was necessary to his life—that he would mope away into idiocy if she were taken from him. He went determined to accept any excuses she might offer—to believe them if they had a shadow of probability, and to pretend to believe them if they had not. Nay, if Grace braved him and confessed her duplicity, he felt that he should throw himself at her feet and sue for her pardon, imploring her in pity to remain with him, whether she felt any affection for him or not.

There is no depth of self-abasement into which love will not push men at Sir Ham's time of life. Grace had assumed her empire over him by acts of flattery, which do more than Capuan odours to effeminate a man; and, now that he was about to lose her, the image of her beauty rose up before the wretched knight with a power of seduction irresistible. His excited senses brought back to him the perfume of her hair, the rosy freshness of her lips half-parted, the lustrous languor of her eyes, deep, smooth, and mysterious as velvet, and the musical accents of her voice when she coaxed him; and all this filled him with a sullen angry resentment—the beginning of downright hate—against Mary for exposing Grace. For after all why could not Mary have left him his illusions if she were a good daughter and really concerned about his happiness? She must have known that it is no kindness to open our eyes to the blemishes of those we love. The hansom which Sir Ham had taken off the stand in Davies street trotted towards Kensington all too slow for the infatuated, impatient lover, and when it reached his door, Sir Ham scrambled out and tossed the driver a sovereign without waiting for the change—a very unusual freak, for ordinary emotions left him quite enough presence of mind to look after sixpences.

He fearfully opened the door with his latch-key and sprang upstairs to the drawing-room, where Lady Pennywoddle lay on a red satin sofa telling herself it was about time to go and dress for dinner. The good lady had spent an afternoon in her favourite pastime of reading the breach of promise cases in the *Reporter*, but her anxiety about the quarrel between her husband and Mary had prevented her from taking her customary delight in this literature, and as soon as she saw the knight she exclaimed:—

"Ham, my dear, Mary has been here, and I hope you have seen her. The poor child was grievin', and it went to my heart, it did."

"Where's Grace?" asked Sir Ham, curtly, as if he would choke.

"I think she's upstairs, dear," answered Lady Pennywoddle, alarmed by his expression.

"She's not gone, then?"

"Gone! no, my dear; I heard her return some time ago, and wondered she didn't come in to me. Shall I go for her?"

"No. Jane, ye'd better go and dress for dinner; I've summit private and

partic'lar to say to Grace." And hereon Sir Ham straddled to the bell, and pulled it with such force that it brought up a footman as promptly as if it had been the spring of a Jack-in-the-box.

"Is Miss Marvell at home?" stuttered the knight.

"Yes, Sir Ham."

"Then go and tell her to come 'ere—at least—no," added he, correcting himself; "go and ask her if she will favour me with an interview for a few minits."

The footman vanished, and Lady Pennywoddle rose to go to her room. As she passed her husband she laid a hand on his shoulder, looking wistfully into his face, and he impatiently requested her to leave him. Many and many a time, and for long afterwards—in truth, to his dying day—he remembered the loveless words he had then addressed to the poor woman who had been the companion of his life—his never failing friend, help, and comforter. She went out uncomplainingly, and when she had gone, Sir Ham paced about the drawing-room like a disturbed bear in a cage.

Now Grace Marvell was waiting for Sir Ham, and yet not daring to hope that he would come back to her and make his peace, for it is only in Balsac's novels that women feel so sure of their power as to know that men will always return and cringe to them. She had been asking herself with sickening dismay what was to become of her if she left Sir Ham's house in disgrace. Prince Casino had hinted no word about making her his wife. He had flirted with her and whispered hyperbolic Italian compliments into her ear; but she guessed from intuition into his character that he would never talk of marriage unless she could bring him a large dowry. For all which she loved him not the less, but the more, as is generally the case with women. There was ambition and stung vanity in her love. Seeing him captivated by her beauty, but not wholly subjugated by it, she longed to conquer his deeper affections—to render him her slave before she became his wife.

But how could she do this if she were driven from Sir Ham's house as an outcast? She had saved a few hundred pounds out of Sir Ham's generous gifts for pin-money, but besides this and her jewels she had nothing. She would not even be able to pay for her father's maintenance in the asylum, and there would be no course open to her but to return to Mrs. Legges' sordid lodging-house in Surrey-street. This in itself was terrifying to her, for she could not break with those habits of luxury which she had so lavishly indulged under Sir Ham's roof. She had been the virtual mistress of the knight's house, and was cheerfully obeyed by the servants as such. She had her own carriage, her maid, a special footman for her own service; and glancing round her rooms, was reminded by their tasteful splendour of the brilliant position she had now imperilled.

They were a suite of rooms which Sir Ham had caused to be furnished for her by one of those gifted upholsterers accustomed to gratify gentlemen who patronize the drama in the persons of pretty actresses. Rare Indian woods, costly cabinets, Beauvais carpets, bed-curtains, and window-hangings of white figured satins rich enough for the coronation robes of a queen, painted panels and ceilings, ivory and Dresden toilet-table fixtures, dressing-case fittings of pure wrought gold; all, in short, that art at the service of extravagance could do to beautify these chambers had been done. And Grace's personal apparel was on a similar scale of wealthy profusion. It needed a room apart to store her innumerable dresses, which had excited the envy of many a peeress. She counted her bonnets, peignoirs, and pelisses by the dozen; her linen was so fine that it could have been drawn through a wedding-ring; the very sheets on her bed were of cambric, and the pillow-cases were hemmed with white borders of precious lace. As for jewellery, Sir Ham had pressed trinkets on her as if he had a diamond mine of his own; and he had been so far afraid lest she should scruple to order whatever she might need of milliners, glovers, perfumers, and others, that he had instructed these people to bring her unasked all things that were "noo and fash'nable"—an order which they cheerfully obeyed, being men, every one. It costs women a pang to forsake luxury of this sort, which is the setting in which beauty has assuredly a natural right to be framed.

So when Grace's maid, directed by the footman, brought Sir Ham's message she inwardly trembled, feeling that the fate of her life was about to be decided;

but her features were composed, for dissimulation is the first polite science learned by her sex. In view of the part she might have to play, she had immediately after her return put on a travelling dress of blue serge with black braiding. She had also taken off all her rings, and only wore round her neck a large gold medallion given to her by her father before his ruin. This metamorphosis was the first thing Sir Ham noticed in her.

"You have sent for me, Sir Ham," she said coldly.

"Yes, Miss Marvell—yes, Grace, my dear," mumbled the poor knight. "That was a sorry business to-day in the tea-room, and I wish to hear no more of it."

He had purposed at first to play dignity in the hope that his forgiveness would be begged for; but the sight of Grace's travelling apparel chilled him to the soul, and Grace easily perceived that he was at her mercy. But though her heart leaped at this discovery of her power, she instantly resolved to repay the anxieties she had endured, and to follow up her advantages in such a way that she should remain mistress of the field to all time. She determined at one stroke to secure her independence as well as resume her empire.

"I must leave your house, Sir Ham," she said, quietly; "I have been insulted in your presence, and I am not so spiritless as to wait to be insulted a second time."

"You shan't go! You're an orphan with nobody to look to you!" exclaimed the knight, almost barking in his distraction, and getting between her and the door, as if he dreaded her escaping there and then. "Let anyone dare to insult you, and they'll see! Mary'll never set foot in my house again unless she begs your pardon."

"I have been accused of trying to instigate you against your daughter," continued Grace, with the same calm pride, but inward exultation at the knight's wrath; "and I am aware that my dependent position under your roof gives a colour to the imputation."

"Dependent? You're dependent only on my love and my respect, my dear," dribbled the agitated knight. "But see here, Grace, my child, I've been thinking that Loan was half got up by you—I shouldn't have touched it but by your advice—so we'll be partners in it. Half of whatever I win shall be your'n. It's a bargain. We'll have it drawn up on stamped paper by Deedes, the lawyer."

This was more than Grace had ventured to expect, but she restrained all appearances of satisfaction.

"If I remain in your house, Sir Ham," she answered, slowly, "it would only be out of my infinite devotion to you, and in the hope that I might be of service to yourself and Lady Pennywoddle; but I should stipulate for myself complete independence. If I felt any affection for Prince Casino—which I do not"—prudently added she, on seeing what a spasm wrinkled the knight's face—"if I felt a lawful affection for the Prince or anybody else, I would concede to no person the right of interfering with me."

"Nobody shall!" protested the knight, with abject and sorrowful meekness. "You shall love whom you please, if the love of an old man like me ain't enough for you; but don't leave me, there's a dear—for I—I can't a-bear it," and two big tears sprang from the knight's eyes, and coursed each other down his miserable face.

"Your fatherly love is very, very precious to me, Sir Ham," rejoined Grace, pretending not to notice these tears, but introducing a well-timed quaver into her own voice. "I—I don't know what I ought to say; but it was not willingly that I thought of leaving you;" then breaking off as though she feared to let her emotion master her: "As to the Loan, Sir Ham, I am afraid you will be giving it up after all the objections which Lady Mayrose has urged?"

"Let Mary mind her own business," growled the knight, endeavoring to punch back the tears into his eyes, for several others had followed the first two. "I'll go on with the Loan because you think well of it, and because you're more than everybody else to me, and we'll be partners, if you stay with me—and you will, won't you, my dear?—say you will—you see I can't help a'cryin'!"

Grace looked as if she were fast relenting, but she did not give an answer.

She acted as if a struggle were going on within her, and turned towards the window to hide her agitation. But before her feigned struggle was ended, she ejaculated : "Sir Ham, here is Prince Casino !"

She had changed colour as she said this, for the prospect of seeing Sir Ham's jealousy aroused anew if the Prince should enquire after herself was not welcome at that moment. Sir Ham shambled to the window, and sure enough the Prince was alighting with flurried looks from his brougham ; but almost immediately behind him came a second brougham, and another gentleman descended. "That's Dexter !" exclaimed the knight. "I wrote to him last night to say the *Reporter* shouldn't support this Government any longer, and now he's come about it. We'll get our matters settled for good now. But don't leave the room, please, my dear," he added entreatingly, as Grace was moving to the door, for he probably wished to ascertain, by observing her demeanour towards Prince Casino, that his suspicions had been truly unfounded. So Grace remained, and the two gentlemen came up together—the Prince in woeful plight ; Mr. Dexter irreproachably dressed as usual, and cool as ice. The knight rubbed his eyes until they were red in trying to dry them, but he turned his back to the light, so that the traces of his recent emotion were not visible. The Prince went through a hurried smirking bow to Grace, and very keen was the look-out which Sir Ham kept on them the while ; but to his inexpressible joy, he detected nothing amorous in this exchange of civilities, the Prince being formal, and Grace cold. He shook hands with the Prince in his turn, a trifle shyly, and then more cordially with Mr. Dexter ; but it was the Prince who began speaking, and with a rush :—

"Ah, *dio*, Sir Ham ! what an afternoon ! Milord Mayrose and Milord Horiette are going to fight a duel."

"Well, so much the better," returned the knight, with stolid wrath, "and I doan't mind if Lord Hornette kills 'un."

"But Milord Mayrose is also going to prevent our Loan," exclaimed the Prince with flustered despair. "He is going to warn your British public in the *London Gazette*. He menaced me with arrest ; he was as one crazy ;" and in dismal, interjectional language the Prince recounted all that we know, omitting only the episodes where he had been made to eat humble-pie. Indeed, he took care to make himself figure to advantage by assuring that he had stood up doughtily against Mayrose's threats. "I said to him, 'Milord, I not fear you, but I hope for your own sake you will do nothing foolish. Sir Pennywoddle is your father-in-law ; if you hinder his Loan he will say you have been ungrateful to him, and go on without minding your *London Gazette*.' That is what I said to him !" vowed the Italian in conclusion.

"And you were right to speak so, for that Mayrose is a cub !" shouted Sir Ham, who had been unable to keep his seat, but had stamped about with snorts of anger during the Prince's recital. "I doan't care a farthin' for the *London Gazette*, dang me ! We've half the press on our side, for we've bought it up, and I'll go on with the Loan, I tell ye, Prince, so long as I've a name in the city."

"I beg to observe, Sir Ham, that you are preparing to take up the cudgels against the Government," remarked Mr. Dexter, who had not yet spoken. "If you do that, we shall all be crumpled up like paper bags. You wrote to me this morning to attack the Ministry, after we have been standing up for it with energy all through the session. A newspaper cannot spin round in that style."

"What ! my own newspaper can't do as I choose ?" sang out the Knight, as if astounded.

"It is not your newspaper," answered Mr. Dexter, tranquilly ; "it is half mine ; and our articles of partnership provide that I shall be editor, and have the sole management of it."

"You are not prepared to deny that the *Reporter* was started with Sir Ham's money ?" intervened Grace, coming impatiently to Sir Ham's rescue.

"I am not prepared to argue with a lady, least of all with one so omnipotent as yourself," replied Mr. Dexter, with tranquil politeness.

"It is a question of fact, sir, not of argument," retorted Grace, reddening at

the epigram. "You would scarcely wish to be classed in that too numerous category of men who forget their benefactors."

Mr. Dexter, who had never liked Grace Marvell, did not deign to state in what category he wished to be classed, but he addressed Sir Ham again; and a highly animated wrangle ensued, which lasted half-an-hour. It was like steel on one side and hot fire on the other, with the screams of the Italian dashed in for music. Mr. Dexter was too shrewdly intent on his own interests to care about quarrelling with Government. It has been said that he believed in Mr. Paramount; now that the *Reporter* had enriched him, he held to Mayrose's promise of a seat in the new Parliament, and saw a chance of making a figure in politics by remaining staunch to the Premier. He proposed to Sir Ham to purchase of him the half share that was his; and the Knight, backed by shakes of the head from Grace, and soon by open interposition on her part, refused. Mr. Dexter then calmly reminded Sir Ham that the obligations resting between them were not so one-sided as was being taken for granted, for that he (Mr. Dexter) had vacated Hivesworth in Sir Ham's interest, thus giving him an opportunity which he would not otherwise have enjoyed of entering public life. This was the first time Mr. Dexter had flung his services into Sir Ham's teeth, and he did so without lifting his voice above a well-bred diapason. He sat with his legs crossed, and his features perfectly unruffled; but his sedateness exasperated Grace, who, forgetting that she had no right to mix in the dispute, exclaimed—

"I wonder how you can say such things, Mr. Dexter. You know that you resigned the seat of Hivesworth because you could not have contested it against Sir Ham."

"You rather abuse a pretty woman's privilege of saying rash things, Miss Marvell," rejoined Mr. Dexter, in the tone he would have used towards Miss Peg Top, of the Bijou Theatre."

"I claim no privilege but that of warning Sir Ham, when people endeavour to take advantage of him," replied Grace, as though she would have been glad to cuff the sardonic editor's ears; "I have never been taken in by your professions of disinterestedness, Mr. Dexter."

"I have by yours, Miss Marvell, and I dare say we have both been in the wrong," he retorted, with a little laugh; "at all events, the editorship of the *Reporter* was given me by contract, and I will assert my right to it even in a law-court."

Prince Casino curled about in his chair like a rasher of bacon on a gridiron. So much jangling and menacing within one day alarmed him, and he threw in a soothing word occasionally, which fell like oil on the fire, and caused everybody to flame up afresh. But at last Sir Ham put an end to the squabble by raising both his hands to his hair as if he meant to lift himself off the hearthrug, and bawled, "I won't have any more of this; I want my dinner. Dexter, I'll come to visit ye in the mornin', and we'll see which is the best man; and Prince, jist you come down to Robgroschens hoffice at eleven; Jiddledubbin'll be there, and we'll get the Loan without any more of this hanged pother-pother, which makes me mad, it do? Now, good evening, both of ye."

He did not invite Prince Casino to dinner, and the Italian was rather chagrined at the omission, for he hardly knew where to go and dine, after having been forced to apologize publicly, before noblemen and dignitaries. He made his bow sheep-facedly, not being able to get so much as a glance from Grace who studiously averted her eyes from him; Mr. Dexter took leave with nonchalant courtesy; and Sir Ham accompanied the pair of them half-way down the staircase to see that he was really going to be rid of them. Then he returned to the drawing-room, and found Grace standing with an expression of half embarrassment and coyness well assumed.

She had sided so actively with the knight that there could be no more question about her going away. She felt it, and blushed as the old man ran towards her with hands outstretched. He took her own hands in his, and forced her back gently towards the sofa, then threw himself on his knees at her feet, rolling his shock of dyed hair in her lap, and covering her fingers with kisses.

"I said a good deal more to those gentlemen than I ought," faltered Grace with charmingly acted confusion, but I cannot help it, Sir Ham, when I see you attacked."

"Oh! Grace, can you wonder about my carin' for you more than wife or child," stammered the old man; "we must never part, dearie; it 'ud break my 'eart, as if you shot me."

"You don't care for me so much as that," she said, with a pretty pout of reproach; "see how savage you were with me to-day, and all about a mere foolish letter!"

"It was owin' to my love, dearie; love crazed me darling," he murmured, intoxicated by the kisses he continued to drink from her warm soft hands. "I thought I loved you like a daughter, Grace, but I don't; if I were free you should be my wife—and perhaps you'll still be that, dearie; we mayn't have long to wait—who knows?"

Then Grace mustered all her power and overcame him with the enchanting strength of her beauty—that fatal beauty which God has given to woman for the exaltation and damnation of man. She suddenly twined her arms round his neck, looked deep into his eyes and kissed him, whispering, "I love you, too, very—very dearly."

The fibres of Sir Ham's heart, his nerves, his joints, thrilled as at the touch of a galvanic battery, and there they remained so enwrapped both of them—she in her triumph, he in the ecstasy of his misguided love, that they did not hear a first faint knock at the door, and then a second. It was Lady Pennywoddle who knocked. Supposing that the interview between her husband and his visitors, and with Grace, must be over, she had come down to wait for dinner.

Twice she knocked, and obtaining no answer, opened the door, but even this did not disturb the poor dazed lover and the girl who was mocking him. She saw them both—perceived her husband kneeling, and heard him utter the words which contained a wish for her death—and God help the women who are allowed to hear such words in requital for a long life of faithfulness! Lady Pennywoddle uttered no cry—made no sound; she gazed with stupor at the scene until she understood it all. Till that moment she had never suspected Grace, because she suspected nobody of wrong—and even now the truth broke upon her with but deadened force, because her mind seemed to part in twain in the sudden anguish of the vision. She turned, leaving the door open, and tottered away over the landing, holding out her hands before her like one blinded, for everything appeared dark around, although lights were glaring. In this way she reached the top of the staircase, staggered on unknowingly, and missed her footing.

There was the sound of a heavy fall, dull and rebounding, then a groan, and cries of servants rushing in consternation.

* * * * *

"What's that? someone has fallen!" exclaimed Sir Ham, springing up as from a dream; and Grace rose, too, paling with apprehension, for she noticed the open door. Both hastened out together.

The gaslight, mellowed by tinted globes, was beating down on the rich mirrors and flowers of the landing, on the wide staircase covered with a Turkey carpet, and half-way down, on one of the marble borders of the steps it showed a splash of red. There were other splashes lower down; and in the hall an affrighted group of footmen and maids were lifting a lifeless form. They carried the poor lady into Sir Ham's study and laid her on the sofa softly, and with murmurs of sympathy—their heart paid homage to a good mistress. There was blood on her pale face, her astonished eyes were open, and her lips slightly moved in a parting convulsion. One of the attendants exclaimed that a sash should be thrown up; but, before anyone could comply, Sir Ham had broken roughly through the circle, and stood by the sofa-side rooted in stupefaction. "Jane!" he cried, in a voice that had nothing earthly from its horror and remorse: "Jane, you're not hurt, my dear? Jane, speak to me!"

* * * * *

No, nevermore, misguided husband, nevermore in this life—not again till she

meets you face to face, and leads you by the hand to that Seat where we must all kneel some day and plead the miserable weakness of human flesh in excuse for our errors.

CHAPTER XXI.

HERR ROEGROSCHEN.

Baron Moses Guldenstock, the great banker and M. P., entering his offices in Lombard street, said to his no less baronial partner, Manasses Geltrubber: "De wife of Shir Ham Pennyvoddle is dead."

"She has left von great fool widowed," replied swarthy Geltrubber, peering at the *Times'* money article.

"Pennyvoddle did not use to be von fool," remarked white-headed Guldenstock, breaking open his letters and dropping them into the waste-paper basket in deliberate succession. "I vonder how it will go now vit dat Rio-Frigande Loan?"

"Von tammed schvindell," commented Geltrubber.

"He came to me for advise about it—dat vas weeks ago," continued Guldenstock, pausing at a letter with a ducal coronet on the seal, and which he laid under a paper weight. "Here is the Dook of Noomarket vants dirty tousand poundsh till hish rentsh come in."

"He takes ush for money-lenders," grumbled Geltrubber, "nevertheless, if his coal-mine is not mortgaged—"

"It isn't; but after dish loan ve must baas him on to de money-lenders, for he ish ruining himself," said Guldenstock. "Gott of Jacob! dat men should be such fools ash to shtake deir landsh and happiness on the legs of an horsh!"

"Dere is dat Lord Canonlaugh shtaking dem on de legs of von ballet-dansher," grinned Geltrubber, cracking his finger-joints. "De oder day, after a meeting at Egsheter Hall for de conversion of ush Israelites, he had de imbudence to come to me and vant to borrow ten thousand 'for good vorks,' as he said, hypocritically lifting up hish eyes to heaven. But I knew de good vorks vas von furnished cottage at Twickenham and a tousand guinea pair of barouche horses for Miss Spinner who danshesh vit more spirit dan clothing. Gott of Isaac, dese Gentiles fancy von is blind as moles to deir little vickedness; but Canonlaugh has no coal-mine, sho I shent him to old Sholomon Fang."

"Dey are all alike," observed Guldenstock, philosophically; "a pervershe and evil generation, Gott help me. Der vas Lady Canonlaugh vanted to teach morals to de little infidels, as she called de children dat vorshipped in our synagogue, and it sheems she learned dose morals of Prince Cashino. Dis reminds me dat it ish Cashino who set dish Pennyvoddle Loan going. As I told you Pennyvoddle came to me for advise, and I gave it him, dinking his son-in-law was mixed up in de bishness."

"A clever man, dat Mayrose, who vill be Prime Minister."

"No, never," answered Guldenstock, judiciously; "he hash a creat mind and a weak heart. He ish honest, and vill always manage to let people dink he ish a rogue. He hash more energy of purposh dan shoundness of judgment. If he vash Prime Minishster he vould trample on all de prejudishes dat grow like brambles over de minds of dis people, and de brambles vould vound him and break his heart. De truth ish Lord Mayrose fanshies himself a Tory, and he ish a Radical."

"Dat ish vy Paramount hash such a liking for him," grunted Baron Geltrubber.

"Yesh, but Paramount hash no heart to break, and he has succeeded vere Mayrose vill always fail," responded Guldenstock, who had not sat twenty years in Parliament for nothing. "I vas shaying, dough, that I had advised Pennyvoddle about his Loan from dinking dat Mayrose had von finger in it. But he hashn't, and de affair ish all in de handsh of a girl who leads Pennyvoddle by the nose, and ish herself led by dat Italian Prince who in hish turn ish led by de devil. Ven I discovered all dish I vash shorry for de good advise I had given."

Thus all our secrets are known, and the mysteries which we imagine we have

best concealed furnish talk to Anglo-Germans in Lombard-street. At the moment when Barons Guldenstock and Geltrubber from the altitude of their financial grandeur were raining contempt on Prince Casino, that Italian was alighting at the office of Robgroschen & Co. in Cannon-street. As he seldom read English newspapers, he was at a loss to account for the dismal greeting extended to him by Herr Robgroschen. The "Co." might have been equally dismal had "Co." been existent, but "Co." figured only on the door-plate and window-blinds of Herr Robgroschen's office.

"Mein Gott, what an unlucky business ish this death of Lady Pennywoddle!" exclaimed Robgroschen, addressing the Prince in French, for he was an Alsatian and used English like soap, with economy. He was a short man in glossy clothes, with a black beard trimmed like a fan, and a brown beaky nose surmounted by a pair of hazel eyes, teeming with the sly humour which comes of long association with Frenchmen. When he laughed he opened his mouth wide like a Nuremberg nut-cracker, and showed thirty-two yellow teeth of uneven size, but in excellent preservation. His peculiarities were that he took snuff out of a mosaic box, and wore on the thumb of his right hand a gold ring with an enormous topaz. His favorite attitude was to stand on one leg rubbing the calf of that leg thoughtfully with his spare foot, and, as he always kept four fingers of either hand in his trousers pockets with the thumbs twiddling outside, his topaz ring was the first thing that struck you in him. Herr Robgroschen's shoulders stooped as if he had long carried a pack of "old clo'," and there is no saying whether he had done so or not, for no one knew exactly—nor was intended to know—what series of adventures had landed him at the age of fifty in this Cannon-street office, where he transacted business about nothing in particular, and about everything profitable in general. "I would have given a big sum for Lady Pennywoddle to have died but one day later," added he, in a Franco-German accent unrenderable into English, as he stowed the *Morning Post* crumpled like a towel into the Prince's stupefied hands.

"Ah dio! Lady Pennywoddle is dead. Ah, la povera!" ejaculated the Prince wonder-stricken, and we may pass over the next five minutes during which he expended in interjections and dismayed gestures all the grief which he did not feel. At length, when this had lasted long enough, Herr Robgroschen, who had been rubbing his left leg with his right boot, changed feet and said:—

"Le tiaple te tout ceci c'est que ce fioux aura beut-edre tu chagrin et ne fiendra boint signer."

"Il viendra, il signera," answered the Prince, meditatively but confidentially. "He said he would be here at twelve, and by the time the other gentlemen have arrived I have no doubt he will have come too. Perhaps Milady Pennywoddle's death will even make him more accommodating."

"Gott hear you! Anyhow it is understood that I am to have ten thousand pounds for surrendering the Loan, and another ten thousand for giving up my office—total, twenty thousand."

"Ten thousand for surrendering? Why not fifty thousand whilst you are about it?" asked the Prince in surprise.

"Well, I could have cleared much more than fifty thousand, if I had had the Loan," said Robgroschen, modestly. "It was a fine affair; and I explained to Pennywoddle how we three—that is he, you and I—could have netted three millions out of it, and never lost one penny; but you blew down my plan. Why did you do so?"

"Because it was a plan that would have made my friend Descamisado pay eight millions for two and a half, and afforded you profits which I would much rather see in Sir Pennywoddle's pockets—and in mine. That is the reason."

"Tut, tut! You will unblushingly tell me, an old hand, that you expect to see Sir Ham Pennywoddle clear profits. You know that Rio-Brigande will not pay the first quarter's interest on the Loan, and that Pennywoddle and Jiddledubbin will be bankrupts before six months!" and Robgroschen winked reproachfully at the Prince Casino, as one thief might do at another.

Now, it was galling to Prince Casino that Robgroschen should wink at him.

He believed in his friend Descamisado, and had every confidence that Rio-Brigande could pay quarterly interests like an honourable and regenerated State. Willing as he was to clear his own small account out of the Loan, he objected to be taxed with seeking to ruin Sir Ham, and especially with endeavoring to enrich himself by the ruin. He was a nobleman, not a swindling adventurer.

So, with a frown that sat well enough on his handsome features, he threw himself into one of Robgroschen's easy chairs, lit a pink cigarette, and puffed at it:—

"Please remember to whom you are speaking, Monsieur Robgroschen. You shall have your ten thousand pounds, but after that we are quits; and be assured that Sir Pennywoddle has engaged in an affair which I would not have recommended had it not been excellent."

"Well, well, you know best," answered Robgroschen, little abashed by the Prince's assurance, "but you see what others think about the business; and Lord Mayrose made you feel like a very small boy yesterday."

"Ah, you have heard of that?" exclaimed the Prince, turning scarlet.

Herr Robgroschen drew his mosaic box, rapped it, and took a pinch of snuff:—

"People hear of everything they are not meant to hear," he grinned. "I know you had to apologize rather humbly, *mon Prince*; and that Milords Mayrose and Hornette wanted to fight a duel because of something you have said; but they won't fight, because Englishmen have grown afraid of gunpowder. What I know, though, is that a man who calls himself a Prince does not show the white feather to an English lord without repenting it. Nein."

"What! do you think I apologized from cowardice?" screamed the Prince, in a tone wherein wrath and unsuspected valour struggled for the mastery, and he bounded from his chair, throwing his cigarette into the grate. "Do you call me a coward, Monsieur Robgroschen?"

"Well, no; let us say it was moral courage," simpered Robgroschen, with heavy German humour, and rubbing his right leg with his left boot mighty sarcastically; "at all events, now you have come into collision with a milord of that size, he will grind you—socially speaking, Prince—to powder, unless you take a prompt revenge on him."

"What can I do?—go and slap his face!" shrieked Prince Casino, who looked in truth as if he was immediately going to step out to perform this exploit.

"If you wish to have your princely neck wrung, that will be the way," chuckled Robgroschen, a ray from whose topaz ring went straight into the Italian's eye; "bah! *mon Prince*, I thought you were a man of wit, who knew how to mix revenge—a good drink, look you, when well prepared. Milord Mayrose expects to inherit Sir Ham Pennywoddle's lands, which were once the lands of his family; now, would it not be a pretty stroke to get those lands into your possession along with Penny Hall—a fine place, *mon Prince*?"

"But how?" asked the Prince, who was still glowing from his recent rage.

"Why, through that enchanting Miss Marvell."

"Through Miss Marvell!"

"Ta, ta, Prince, you are finessing with your friend, Robgroschen, which is not handsome, not straightforward, Gott be witness! Don't I know that Miss Marvell has fastened her pretty claws on that poor Pennywoddle! doesn't every one know it who has seen him turn to a driveller in her hands! Aye, he was a sharp man once, that poor Pennywoddle, but don't I know that you and Miss Marvell play with him now, like two kittens with a wool ball, and have not done playing with him yet."

"What do you mean by that insinuation, Monsieur Robgroschen?" inquired the Prince, haughtily, in his best French, but turning pale.

"It is no insinuation, Gott help me! It is a fact," sniggered Robgroschen, sinking his voice to a sly whisper. "*Mon Prince* has said to himself, 'Miss Marvell shall marry Sir Ham, and he shall settle on her his lands and all his available personalities, so that if he should get ruined, she shall still be very rich. Well, when the ruin comes, Sir Ham may die of sorrow or excitement, for he is an old man, and marriage with a young woman is not healthy at his time of life. Then when I have buried him, I will marry his rich young widow.' That is what *mon*

Prince has said, and it was a fine plan. The first thing necessary was that Lady Pennywoddle should die, and she is dead. Gott be good to me ! it was well played."

"Do you mean to hint I have had a hand in the death of Lady Pennywoddle ?" hissed the Prince, standing up with alarm on his face, and glaring at Robgroschen with astonished indignation ; but Robgroschen answered by maliciously staring into his eyes.

"I hint nothing, *mon Prince* ; Lady Pennywoddle fell mysteriously down a staircase, and the dead tell no tales."

"Dieu du ciel ! you are a great rascal," muttered the Prince hoarsely, as he tried to control his emotion. "I made use of you in this Loan because I thought that in such an important affair the end justified the means, but you are making me pay cruelly for my folly. Know that the base scheme you impute to me has never crossed my mind."

"Well, more's the pity, Prince, for it was a clever scheme—quite artistic," was Robgroschen's placid answer. "You will find London society rather cold to you if you make enemies for yourself among Ministers ; but if you get land, they will forgive a great deal, for the English love land. Still, you did wrong to thwart the plans I submitted to Sir Ham, for we might have all become rich without his being ruined, though this need not have prevented him dying at the fitting moment. As it is, if Sir Ham is to be married before his bankruptcy, the thing must be done very soon, Prince—very soon."

"Leave me, sir," replied the Prince, in broken tones, and turning away his face. "I will read the paper till these gentlemen arrive, and I want to be alone."

"You shall be quite alone, Prince," said Robgroschen, with mock obsequiousness. "Here is a nice paper, the *Reporter*, which tells how little rogues come to trouble. Mein Gott, I always pity those little rogues. Will you take a pinch of snuff, *mon Prince* ? It helps to clear the brain."

CHAPTER XXII.

A SIGNATURE.

The gentlemen expected at Herr Robgroschen's office for the signature of the Loan contract were Sir Joel Jiddledubbin, who was to go shares with Sir Ham, Senor Fandangoly Bolero de los Doblonos, Rio-Brigandian Charge d'Affaires (unaccredited) in London, Mr. Tarry, of the firm Burk, Tarry, and Bagge, solicitors to the said Senor, and our old acquaintance, Mr. Deedes, solicitor to Sir Ham. Mr. Scrappe, a stockbroker of fame, was also expected.

They were to come at twelve, and Prince Casino, as he sat waiting for them, munched his moustache and paid no attention whatever to the *Reporter*. But whilst he sits chewing the cud of meditation, let us spend a minute in examining that lucrative plan which Herr Robgroschen charged him with having brought to nought.

The plan has more than once been carried out in foreign loans for the behoof of the British public, and in this instance it must have worked well as usual, the only losers being the bondholders. Herr Robgroschen's original part in the Loan consisted in playing the man who was to be "bought off," and for this he was to receive the sum of £2,000. But such a paltry gain seemed contemptible to one who sniffed the infinite possibilities of profit lurking in a big transaction of this sort ; so Robgroschen had gone privately to Sir Ham and said, "Let you, I, and the Prince manage this matter together, and in a businesslike way. Rio-Brigande wants £4,000,000. It must empower us to issue a loan for £8,000,000 at ten per cent. For every £100 bond which the public really buy we will hand over £50 to Senor Descamisado, but of this he must lodge £20 in the Bank of England to secure payment of interest for at least two years ; for I have not the slightest faith in his professed guarantees of customs duties and tobacco monopoly."

At this Sir Ham had stared. "No faith in customs duties ?"

"Not a particle, nor in anything belonging to the country. Senor Descamisado will give out that he wants the money to build a railway, which is to put the

rich auriferous mines of his Republic in relation with the seacoast. When he has got the coin we shall hear nothing more of the railway nor of the mines, but we shall see Senor Descamisado turning up in Paris some day as a millionaire, with a mansion in the Champs Elysees. That, however, need not trouble us, for what we have to do is simply this: we will issue the Loan, and instantly put it at a premium on the Stock Exchange; say we issue it at 95 and get it quoted at 99; the whole will then be applied for by the people who will re-sell it to us at the premium. We shall then have it all in our own hands, but we shall have obtained a quotation on the Stock Exchange; and little by little, by giving brokers a liberal commission and percentage for inducing their clients to purchase, we shall sell all the script for good. It will indeed seem an excellent investment to the public, who will really be paid their 10 per cent. interest for two years out of the Loan itself."

Hereon Sir Ham had stared harder than before: "Out of the Loan itself."

"Yes; but they won't know that," proceeded Robgroschen, cautiously. "And now see how our account will stand. We shall have to pay about £100,000 to buy back the Loan; different brokers for dealing will get about £40,000; my friend, the broker Scrappe, who will manage with his colleagues and puff the concern on 'Change, will claim £10,000; and we may jot down £50,000 as the price of newspaper advertisements, circulars, squaring City editors, and gratis bonds to influential people in high places, say, £300,000 in all. Well, the difference between that and four millions will represent our share of profits—that is, one million and a half each to you and me, and the surplus to Casino, who will thus get a much bigger plum than he has any right to expect. Do you see and agree?"

Sir Ham saw, but he did not agree. Perhaps if left to himself he might have done so, for although he abhorred dishonesty, and had sent hundreds of thieves to the House of Correction for stealing shillings, he looked upon the public as a grand flock of sheep from whose back a man may fairly pull tufts of wool without being called hard names. But Prince Casino had energetically opposed the plan and had instructed Grace to do so. Believing, as he did, in Descamisado, the Prince fancied that the gifted Patriot would never consent to a loan on such usurious terms as the above, but would call him (Casino) a bungler, and empower somebody else to open negotiations in a new quarter. Prince Casino did not wish to be called a bungler, and, besides, the monstrous profits which Robgroschen dangled before his eyes had too swindlesome an air to please him. His slumbers would have been broken by fear of the policeman had he pocketed £700,000 in a manner flagrantly dishonest, for he had not the nerve of financial genius. He much preferred smaller, yet substantial gains, which should leave him at rest with his conscience, and bring no terror of exposure, with consequent reprobation. He also aspired to the brilliancy which a successful Loan, well-sold and well-paid, would shed on him as a diplomatic negotiator; and had thoughts of supplanting Senor Fandango, and becoming Rio-Brigandian Minister in London, should Senor Descamisado make his country worth the representing.

So he and Grace explained to Sir Ham that Robgroschen's plan was an insult to Senor Descamisado. The Prince did not dare to denounce the Alsatian as a downright scamp, for there was an unpleasant secret between them; but he harped on the assurance that Rio-Brigande would become perfectly solvent under Descamisado's rule, that customs and tobacco were first-class guarantees, and that as Descamisado consented to give twelve per cent. for the temporary accommodation it was manifestly unfair to try and bleed him further. To do Sir Ham justice, he liked to discharge business with a belief that everything was to be plain sailing; but the upshot of all this was that the Prince and Grace had virtually cajoled the knight into undertaking the Loan on conditions such as many a well-established European State could not have obtained from a regular and wide-awake banker.

It was for the purpose of witnessing the signature to the notable document which was to bind Ham Pennywoddle and—to a lesser amount—his friend Joel Jiddledubbin, that the personages above named had been convoked at Robgroschen's office. Contrary to Prince Casino's declaration to Mayrose that everything had been signed, nothing had yet been signed, and Sir Ham was to be free to retract up till noon on this day—the day after Lady Pennywoddle's death.

The first person to arrive was Senor Fandango de los Doblonos and his nephew and secretary, Senor Bolero de los Reales. They were both as brown as if they had been steeped in tobacco juice ; their teeth were black ; their hair stood up on end like horse-hair, profusely oiled and defying all attempts of the comb to effect a parting ; and the fore-fingers and thumbs of their left hands were yellow with the moisture of cigarettes which they rolled themselves. Except that Senor Fandango was grey-headed and Senor Bolero coal-hued, they might have passed for twin brothers ; as it was, their voices—crisp, grating, guttural voices—were identical. Senor Fandango had been Minister Plenipotentiary in days before Downing Street had given up in despair recognising the successive governments of Rio-Brigande ; and he was only awaiting the revival of recognition to present his credentials anew at Windsor. Meanwhile, as his salary was not paid with desirable regularity, he was reduced to making an honest livelihood by selling Rio-Brigandian decorations, melical diplomas, grants of land (situate in swamps), and various monopolies which British merchants bought confidently and repented of at leisure. On entering the office, Senor Fandango took from Senor Bolero a silver-paper parcel, which the latter had been carrying with precautions, as if it was something nice from the pastry cook's, and he laid it on the mantel-shelf.

"Are those the orders?" asked Prince Casino, rising, still very pale, to shake hands with Senor Fandango.

"Yes, they are," answered his ex-Excellency, with some solemnity.

Soon after Sir Joel Jiddledubbin, maker of wind-instruments, and late Sheriff of London, lumbered in, for he was a large man, twice the size of his friend Pennywoddle. Both the Prince and Senor Fandango made much of him, and Sir Joel appeared touched, for the society of princes and peers was what he best loved in the world—next to himself, the Bible, his wife and six daughters, and turtle soup with plenty of calipash. We say the Bible, because Sir Joel was noted as a fervent elder of the Nonconformist Jumpers, though he had lately thought of seceding from this faith and becoming a Ritualist, to keep step with the fashion. *Dux femina facti* : it was Lady Jiddledubbin who was instigating him to this apostasy. She was a sharp lady who looked after his welfare in many ways, and on this morning had said to him : "You'll be one of the quality, Joel, and had better buy a new pair of gloves." So Joel had bought a pair of "large nines," violet colour, and seemed concerned to behold that the dye on them was coming off on the palms of his broad hands.

Whilst Sir Joel talked with the three foreigners about the Loan which was to open wide to him the golden portals of honour and society, Mr. Scrappe the stock-broker tripped in, and shortly afterwards Mr. Tarry, from Burke, Tarry, and Bagge's. Mr. Scrappe was a rosy young man with sandy whiskers and moustache, a double-breasted frock-coat silk-faced, fawn-coloured pantaloons, and white gaiters. He had a bunch of flowers in his button-hole, switched a gold-headed cane from hands covered with butter-hued gloves, and had what looked to be a blue velvet betting-book peeping out from his breast. It was the passion of Mr. Scrappe to be mistaken for an officer in the Guards, and to feign immense simplicity in money matters. When he could lose a bet of a few dozen guineas at whist with any of the nobility, he was glad ; and the nobility often humoured him on both these points. But when anyone presumed on Mr. Scrappe's simulated simplicity to try and get to the weather side of him in big operations, they met with the same surprise as the gentleman who once bonneted Mr. Jem Mace in a crowd, taking him by his size to be nobody.

Nothing need be said about Mr. Tarry except this, that the prospect of meeting Mr. Deedes of Lincoln's Inn made him feel clammy about the brow. Mr. Deedes' practice lay in conveyancing, great title deeds, marriage settlements, and the rest, and his clients were the flower of Debrett's red volumes ; Mr. Tarry hailed from Furnival's Inn, and was often found fishing in troubled waters. Habitually a jocular man, and particular about his linen and finger-nails, all the jocularity oozed out of him when Mr. Deedes walked in, omitting to notice him, and he began to bite his nails and rumple his shirt-front. Mr. Deedes wholly disapproved of the Loan, and regarded all the company present as so many bad characters who

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were victimising his client Sir Ham and richly deserved to be dealt with at Bow Street. He had expostulated with Sir Ham in earnest terms about the folly the latter was committing; but finding him hopelessly obstinate, had not felt it binding upon him to refuse him professional assistance. He saw no reason, however, for acknowledging Mr. Tarry; and Mr. Tarry, profoundly humiliated, naturally pretended to be unconscious of him.

The company were all grouped round the table of the office parlour, whereon lay a form of contract which Herr Robgroschen had spread out with paper weights at the corners to keep it down. It was a luxurious parlour; and on the red-papered walls hung numerous pictures, prints, and plans relating to Rio-Brigande. There were, first of all, over the mantel-shelf two Parisian photographs of small and yellow Senor Descamisado, one displaying him in uniform, and the other in evening dress, with a white cravat as fierce as a ruff. There was a print of the "Puerta de la Constitucion," or principal thoroughfare of Rio-Brigande, with barouches, and horsemen prancing about, in as great numbers as if the place was as secure as Constitution Hill in London. Further on came a print from an American illustrated paper of "The population acclaiming Senor Descamisado after his authoritative dissolution of the Cortes"; and alongside of these many freshly executed drawings of "the proposed line of rail from the Gold Mines of Rio-Brigande to the sea." Sir Joel Jiddledubbin, much interested by the fashionable company airing themselves in the Puerta de la Constitucion," was asking Senor Fandango whether this were really a graphic picture; and the Senor, whose favoured country had never boasted a barouche since these vehicles were invented, was answering with deep conviction, "truly graphic," when the black marble clock over the fire-place struck noon. A hush ensued; and for the next minute nothing was audible but the discreet noise made by Mr. Tarry biting his nails. Will he come or will he not? was the mute question asked by each face; but the answer was given at three minutes past twelve by a clerk throwing open the door and announcing:—

"Sir Ham Pennywoddle!"

The knight's dead wife, could she have awakened from her sleep, would not have known him, so great was the havoc which one night had wrought on him. Arrayed from head to foot in black, with his face bereft of all colour and his eyes sunk deep in their orbits, he advanced to the centre of the room and stared vacantly about him, and as if he did not know how to act now that he was left to himself. A murmur of sympathy escaped the lips of one or two among those present; but Mr. Deedes exclaimed, "Good heavens! gentlemen, he is not in a fit state to sign any binding document."

Saying this, Mr. Deedes approached Sir Ham and took his hand:

"I was deeply grieved to hear of your loss, Sir Ham; but do you know why you have come here to-day?"

"Yes, to—m—make some money," moaned Sir Ham, gazing at the lawyer as if he failed to recognize him.

"You are going to sign one contract into vich you freely entered. Is it not so, sir?" broke in Senor Fandango de los Doblones, approaching in his turn.

"Ye-es," stammered the knight. Then peering into the Senor's face, he suddenly lifted one of his hands and pressed it between both his own. "Your'e my old friend Joel Jiddledubbin," he murmured, plaintively. "I didn't know you at first, becos' of the light. Well, she's gone from us, Joel, my Jane has—my Jane—Mike and Mary's mother. She allus liked you, Joel, and told me, t'other day to remain friends with you. But I want to get my business done quickly, becos'—she is waiting for me in the carriage, poor Jane is."

"I protest, gentlemen, that my client, Sir Ham, is not fit to sign any document, repeated Mr. Deedes, in excitement, laying one of his black gloves restrainingly on the dazed knight's arm.

"Mein Gott, it ish only von formalitee," ejaculated Herr Robgroschen, with a smirk. "Everydinks was shettled long ago, Mr. Deedes." And getting between the lawyer and Sir Ham, he half led, half shoved, the latter to the table. "Shign here, shir, at de bottom of dis paper, de usual bisness shignature, Shir Ham."

And he planted between Sir Ham's unresisting fingers a new quill pen full of ink.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PRINCE CASINO'S SCORE.

Sir Ham signed.

When he had done so, Sir Joel Jiddledubbin took the pen and did likewise. Six of the seven gentlemen present then warmly shook hands with the pair of financiers, congratulating them as if they had done something out of the common way—which they truly had. Mr. Deedes was like an honest man who had got into a company of thimble-riggers. He rubbed his gentlemanly white palms together as if he washed his hands of an affair so knavish; then stooped to examine the document by which Pennywoddle and Jiddledubbin bound themselves to pay within a specified date, the former three millions sterling, the latter one million, into the Bank of England to the account of the Treasury of Rio-Brigande de las Bancyrottas. If Mr. Deedes could have discovered a flaw in the document, he would have rejoiced and held his peace till he could have persuaded Sir Ham, in a repentant hour, to get the transaction quashed by the High Court of Chancery. But the document had no flaw. It had been admirably drawn up and engrossed in the office of Messrs. Burke, Tarry, and Bagge, who knew the High Court of Chancery by heart—more glory to them!

But while Mr. Deedes pored over the parchment scroll Senor Fandango y Bolero de los Doblonos was observed to bestir himself mysteriously; and, the significance of the silver-paper parcel on the mantel-shelf was made apparent.

The Senor lifted this parcel with grave care, brought it to the table and unfolded it. Two broad orange ribbons of watered silk, and a couple of silver stars with some gold device in the centre were displayed; and the Senor, resting his mahogany hands on the table, thus unbosomed himself of an expressive speech:—

“Seer Pennyvoddle, Seer Jeedledubbeen, de Republic, my meestress, she have an eye on de great men of all countrée, and vith emotion vatches deir grandeur. You are great men, who like de Jupiters in de fable have turned yourselves into showers of gold to visit my beautiful land, vitch is embarrassed in her circumstances. Senor Descamisado, presently de master of dat land, he commands me to greet you both Knights Grand Crosses of our illustrious Order of Santo Ladrone, and hereby to invest you with the insignia dereof vit his compliments.”

Having uttered these eloquent words, Senor Fandango took up one of the orange ribbons, and, holding it in both hands as if it were a bandage with a poultice in it, approached Sir Ham. The knight stood with a smileless air of wonder whilst the gaudy ribbon was being passed over his head, and whilst one of the sheen stars was pinned on the left breast of his coat; but Sir Joel Jiddledubbin, when his turn came for undergoing this unforeseen ceremony, waxed vermilion with a satisfaction at once pompous and modest, much too great for words. He was fairly touched; it seemed to him that these foreign States were indeed places worth dealing with; and his only regret was that he could not walk down Cornhill to exhibit himself with his honestly-earned badges of distinction. He would have liked to step into Birch's arrayed in the orange ribbon and star, and eat a plate of turtle-soup in the front shop.

Senor Bolero assisted Senor Fandango in the investiture, but it was noticeable that the latter carefully excluded Prince Casino from all share in it. He well knew that the Prince meant to try and supplant him from the Ministership in London, in the event of Rio-Brigande becoming a reputable State again, and therefore he was anxious to prove that for the present at least he alone officially represented Senor Descamisado. It had been as wormwood to him that Prince Casino should have had so much to do with the Loan, and especially that the Loan contract stipulated for the payment of the four millions into the Bank of England instead of into his (Fandango's) hands, as the general custom is in such cases; but he consoled himself by reflecting that the relations Rio-Brigande and her agents had ever been conducted on principles of mutual distrust. And Senor Descamisado was too much of a Conservative to innovate on these principles for the sake of entrusting Senor Fandango y Bolero de los Doblonos with four millions in ready money.

In other respects, however, Senor Fandango was fully equipped with credentials testifying to his respectability. He had brought with him a portentous paper, with a monstrous white seal affixed, empowering him to conclude negotiations on his country's behalf, and also letters patent (he kept a stock by him) to render the creation of the two new knights of Santo Ladrone perfectly regular. The insignia of this illustrious order had been bought out of Sir Ham's own money—that is with some of the funds committed to Prince Casino for secret service. Senor Fandango had begged £50 of the Prince, that the insignia might be of good quality, and he had bought the two ribands and stars for £10 a piece of one of the numerous shops in the Paris Palais Royal which retail these necessities—the £30 odd, as well as the 1000 guinea fee, which each of the new knights were asked to pay within eight days of their investiture, constituting Senor Fandango's little perquisites. One has only to add that the Order of Santo Ladrone owes its name to the penitent thief who died on the cross, and whom Rio-Brigande has taken for its Patron Saint. Some Frenchman contended that this penitent thief, growing tired of looking after a country that never paid its debts, had delegated his duties to the thief who had never repented, and who at the same time kindly consented to look after all the other Republics of South America. But one can only believe half of what those French say.

Now, Sir Ham and Sir Joel having been so unexpectedly decorated nothing remained for them but to take off their decorations and stow them into their pockets. Sir Ham was not equal to performing this service for himself; Mr. Scrappe the stockbroker did it for him, laughing somewhat *in petto* at the whole business, and then the poor knight, who had been silent since the signing of the contract, said seriously, "I think I'd jist like to go, becoss She's a waitin' for me."

Although the door was opposite him he could not see it, but waddled towards a cupboard where Herr Robgroschen kept a bottle of Dutch *schnaps* for his private use. That financier restrained him by the coat-skirt and passed him over to Prince Casino and Mr. Deedes, who were standing side by side. It was then noticed by Mr. Tarry, who had a quick eye for small facts, that Prince Casino seemed to shrink from the touch of Sir Ham. He had been eyeing the knight with a strange expression, in which something not unlike fear predominated, and now he appeared unwilling to accompany him out of doors. Sir Ham, however, having caught him mechanically by the sleeve, it became impossible for the Prince to disengage himself. He walked out with Sir Ham and Mr. Deedes, and in the carriage waiting at the office door perceived Grace Marvel, attired in deep mourning, and with her veil down. Grace evidently wished to speak to the Prince, for she leaned forward and beckoned to him with a glance. Mr. Deedes having brought Sir Ham to anchor on the pavement in order to test by a few questions whether he were really *compos mentis*, the Prince had no opportunity to shirk Grace's summons. He approached reluctantly, and she whispered: "Prince, I must see you this evening. If you come to Kensington at eleven and walk up and down outside the house, my maid will let you in. That is the only means I can devise for seeing you, but what I have to say is very important. You will come, will you not?" This she added because of the Prince's manifest hesitation.

"Ye-es," stammered the Prince, but he looked at her with a cold terrified stare, and trembled a little. He was glad when Sir Ham, released by Mr. Deedes, climbed into his brougham and was driven off. As the Prince was turning to enter his own carriage he met the severe features of Mr. Deedes, who had markedly avoided bowing to Grace. "You appear to have taken a leading part, Prince, in this decoying of my client," said the lawyer warmly; "but you must not make too sure that the law will not require an account of your conduct. I would swear before a judge that Sir Ham is the victim of a conspiracy, and that he was as much entrapped into the proceedings of this day as if he had been drugged."

Prince Casino hied him westwards in a state of alarm difficult to depict on paper. Mr. Deedes' menace was disquieting, but it effected him far less than Herr Robgroschen's hint that there had been foul play in Lady Pennywoddle's death. It was this that made the Prince shrink from Sir Ham's touch, and caused him to stare at Grace in a manner which had seemed to her inexplicable.

The truth is he had conned over Robgroschen's words while pretending to read the newspaper, and it had flashed upon him with a lurid gleam that all circumstances did really point to foul play. He knew Grace to be unscrupulous, and Sir Ham to be dotingly in love; the fall of Lady Pennywoddle down a staircase was unnatural; what more likely than that the lovers should have murdered the wretched woman and spread a false report that she had died by accident? An Italian readily credits a murder tending to remove an obstructive wife or husband from the path of true love; and then Sir Ham's confused behaviour in the office savoured of conscience-stricken guilt. Of course, there would be an inquest—Mr. Tarry had remarked that it would probably be held that very afternoon—but what if the Coroner should be as suspicious as Herr Robgroschen? What if he should scent out a dark secret, and detect that Lady Pennywoddle had been poisoned or deliberately pushed down the stairs? Murderers are proverbially incautious, and British coroners keen-eyed as lynxes. This coroner might order the arrest of Sir Ham and of Grace, and implicate the Prince himself in the suspected crime. Nay, Grace's appointment for that evening might have been made on purpose to warn the Prince that he and Grace were in danger. The houses on both sides of the street, the lamp-posts, the sandwich-men, seemed to whirl round in an infernal gallop when this fear broke upon Prince Casino.

He drove to the Brummel. Though sober, like all his countrymen, he felt the need of half a bottle of champagne to steady his nerves, and went straight into the dining-room, where he was instantly struck by the distant bearing which different members assumed towards him. He thought his own jarring sensitiveness must be creating him an illusion, and so stood at the centre-table waiting for his refreshment, and hoping that the wine would enable him to see clearer. But there was no illusion. Lord Beaujolais and Sir Tito, indignant at the Prince for having been the cause of the threatened duel between Mayrose and Hornette, and wishing to check all rumours as to the said duel, had been giving out that there had been only a misunderstanding about "some confounded lie Casino had told;" and Lord Beaujolais, who could be very terrible with all who were not peers of the first water, had further alluded to the Prince as "a blackguardly Italian, by Jove."

So the Prince, when he had drunk his wine—and he tossed it down in two draughts out of a tankard—found that the faces of the members remained as cold as before. Formerly his presence had always been greeted with cries of welcome, and men were delighted to get him to lunch with them for the sparkling anecdotes and racy jests with which he could enliven a repast; but now he began to understand the force of Herr Robgroschen's warnings as to the danger of falling out with English grandees. Even that prince of well-dressed and amiable exquisites, Sir Windsor Chatt, who had few prejudices and no enemies, favored the Prince with a formal bow instead of a smile; and the despairing Italian was glancing around the room begging for a kind word, as an outcast for bread, when young Lord Chevychase rose from a far-off table and joined him with downcast looks. It chanced that the Prince was under invitation to dine at Chevychase House in a few days to meet a Royal personage, so that the Marquis could not possibly have avoided noticing him; but Chevychase in a whisper requested the Prince to come with him outside the room; and when they were in the passage—

"I say, Cass, old man," he began, sympathizingly, "I'm weally awfully sorry, but the Pwince sent down this morning to stwike your name off my wife's dinner-list. He let it stand last week when we sent it him, and I didn't know how to tell you what had been done; but plain speaking is best. You might have learned the thing from others."

"His Royal Highness, he has struck off my name!" ejaculated the Prince, piteously. "But *Dio mio*, vat have I done?"

"Egad, you ought to know better than we," said the Marquis, wretchedly. "I suppose it is because you have quawelled with Mayrose."

"But, my dear Chevychase, your charming wife, she too detests Mayrose: I have heard her say so."

"So have I, more than once; but we're different," sighed his lordship, with worldly philosophy. "Hornette and I can quawell with whom we please, because

no one dare hurt us ; but, you know, old man, it's always bad work for a foreigner, or even for an Englishman who isn't precious sure of his position to get sparring with a Minister like Mayrose. Why were you such a duffer !"

"*Mon Dieu!* I have sparred with nobody, and am not a duffer. Could I guess that you and milady Chevychase and everybody would turn round on me because I was persecuted by one whom you all hate."

"My wife hasn't turned round on you," replied the Marquis. "Egad, she wanted to fly at the Pwince, countermand the dinner, and all sorts of things, but I wouldn't allow her. It's the first time I ever withstood her, by Jove ; but, you see, a Woyal Pwince can't help standing by the Queen's Ministers ; and, look here, Cass, let me give you a hint," added his lordship, confidentially ; "we fellows—that is, men like Mayrose, Hornette and I—often fall out, but we don't suffer outsiders to mix in our disputes. You'll find Hornette throw you over like the west, because it won't suit him to make people think he wants foweign allies to fight his own battles. What you had best do is to make it up with Mayrose, then go abroad a bit, and when you come back all this tiff will have blown over ; and for the future, old man, keep out of wows."

This was like telling the Prince that all his efforts to secure a social foothold in England had been in vain, and that he was reckoned of no more account than a puppet by these proud British aristocrats with whom he had aspired to mix on equal terms. He left the Brummel feeling that he should never dare to enter it again, and slunk into the Palæstra hard by to seek Mr. Quintus Dexter, partly to get comfort by talking with somebody not hostile, partly to learn how that gentleman's personal dispute with Sir Ham had ended. Mr. Dexter came out to him in the vestibule, wearing black gloves and a complimentary mourning hat-band out of respect for Lady Pennywoddle, for he was a nice observer of social courtesies.

"Have you seen Sir Pennywoddle to-day ?" asked the Prince, inexpressibly soothed by the Editor's shaking hands with him.

"No ; nor am I likely to," said Mr. Dexter. "He cannot dislodge me from my editorship, and will keep friends with me if he is wise. You know his wife is dead ?"

"Yes ; a shockingly sudden death."

"Curiously sudden. I shouldn't wonder if that girl Grace Marvell had killed the poor old lady."

This was like a wedge of ice piercing through the Prince's marrow.

"You think Miss Marvell capable of murder, my good Dexter ?" and Prince Casino's eyes rolled like goggles.

"No ; I didn't say that. I said I *shouldn't wonder* if she had disposed of the poor woman, which constitutes a shade of difference. You saw how she handled Sir Ham yesterday in our presence. She made it very clear that it was she who wore the hat in the household ; and to tell you the truth I had long been expecting Lady Pennywoddle's sudden death."

"You had long expected it ?"

"Yes—as a natural sequence to events. I don't mind telling you that I once had an idea of proposing to little Miss Pennywoddle ; but when Miss Marvell came into the house it needed but a pair of eyes to guess that she would eventually acquire her present power, and make a son-in-law's position difficult. She and I have never adored each other. I don't think she is the girl to give one poison or a cold knife, but I am pretty certain that her goings on with Sir Ham have contributed in some mysterious way to poor Lady Pennywoddle's death ; and I tell you this, Prince, because I have heard that you are rather smitten with her charms. If so, you would do well to beware ; unless you like what the French call *une maitresse femme*."

This was the crowning drop to the Prince's cup of bitterness. Robgroschen suspected foul play, so did Mr. Dexter, and both talked of his supposed love for Grace. All that was wanting now was for a policeman to waylay him as he left the club, and apprehend him by the collar. The Prince positively feared to return to his chambers lest he should meet a detective there, and he mooned about the streets on foot, forming all manner of insane plans for flying the country, and leav-

ing everything he possessed behind. At other moments he thought he would go and fling himself on his knees before Mayrose, humbly beg pardon for having advised the loan, and disclosing his suspicions about Grace, vow his own innocence and throw himself on Mayrose's protection as a Minister. But the thought that Mayrose might disbelieve his vows and cause him instantly to be taken to Newgate in a cab deterred him. Towards six o'clock in the evening he found himself, hot and footsore, in one of the dingy thoroughfares near Leicester Square, and there encountered a small boy scudding over the pavement with the second edition of that well-informed evening journal, the *Muffin Bell*. Tied round the boy's neck and fluttering over his chubby body was a contents' bill, and among the items enumerated on it was: "*Inquest on Lady Pennywoddle.*"

With fingers shaking as in an ague, Prince Casino stopped the small boy, gave him a shilling, and took a paper. Then he trudged panting up a blind alley to read it. Never had his eyes raced over columns as they did then, and he rested his hand against a pump ready to prop himself if the news should be disastrous. But the verdict he read was "Accidental death," and thereon he drew the heaviest sigh of relief he had ever exhaled in his life. The inquest had been held in Sir Ham's own dining-room and seemed to have lasted only a couple of hours. The servants had been examined, and there had been a "sensation" in the room when Sir Ham had broken down in giving evidence. Miss Marvell had been complimented by the Coroner on her lucid way of stating what she knew; and that was all, excepting that the *Muffin Bell* published a leader expatiating on the defective build of modern staircases.

The verdict rid the Prince of his immediate fears as to the policeman, but it did not shake his belief in Grace's guilt. Only, beholding now how craftily she had contrived the murder so as to disarm the Coroner's suspicions, his respect for her was heightened, and he was seized with the ludicrous dread that if he offended such a girl he might rue it. He divined that she loved him—he never could have used her so successfully as a tool had that not been the case; and his own admiration for her beauty was very sincere. But with foreign gentlemen like Prince Casino, admiration for beauty does not point necessarily to marriage. There are other ways of worshipping, and the Prince inclined to those other ways, for, although he had no objection to marriage in the abstract (he had, indeed, caressed the fancy of some day espousing an English girl,) the ideal bride of his imagination was some daughter of a great house, with rent roll in one hand, escutcheon in the other, and an army of noble relatives behind.

Should he go to meet Grace at eleven, or should he not? was the question which now presented itself to the Prince, and it sorely harassed him as he wended his way back to his Pall Mall chambers. They were slovenly chambers, shabby and not clean, for Italians have little notion of apartmental comfort; and the Prince was scarcely ever indoors two hours together, except at night. But on this day he spent all the evening in his rooms, not daring to go out and dine anywhere. He had no dinner, but with a spirits-of-wine lamp made himself a cup of black coffee, and munched a biscuit; then wept at finding himself so forlorn. He asked himself as the tears trickled down his plump cheeks how he should act if Grace declared to him point-blank that he must become her husband when she had married and killed Sir Ham? If she were very energetic he saw no means of refusing, for she might follow him about from city to city with a dagger intent on wreaking vengeance. He had heard of women doing such unseemly things. By-and-bye an Italian played "*Ah, che la morte*" under his windows gave him solace, for he compared himself to an operatic hero in trouble, and eventually his new-born courage suggested to him the prudence of not missing his appointment. So he carefully dressed himself in his evening clothes, with a pair of black gloves, and shortly before eleven alighted from a hansom a few doors from Sir Ham's house.

The fashionable street was silent and deserted. There were no parties at any of its houses for a wonder. A policeman stood under a lamp-post staring at the new moon, and Prince Casino gave an involuntary shudder as he passed him. He strolled up and down the pavement with nervous steps till a neighboring church clock struck eleven, and punctually to the hour the door of Sir Ham's house was

stealthily opened. A young maid in black, with white cap, collar and cuffs, came under the portico, and on seeing the Prince retreated without making any sign, and held the door open. Prince Casino walked in.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PRINCE CASINO'S WOOING.

Grace received Prince Casino in the boudoir belonging to her own apartments. It was like the room of a royal palace. There was no gas, but six wax candles of pearly whiteness set in branches jutting from oval mirrors bathed the blue furniture in a light beautifully clear. On the round table in the centre of the room stood a small, exquisitely-chased silver urn, and a tea-service of porcelain so transparent as to be like pink shells. These preparations for tea removed all melodramatic glamour from the room, and comforted the Italian as he crossed the carpet to salute Grace.

She was seated in a low arm-chair near the fireplace, where, although it was summer, two beech logs were burning merrily, diffusing cheerfulness without heat. She wore an evening dress of black *crepe de Chine*; in each of her ears was a black pearl, and round her throat a three-rowed neck-lace of the same costly gem. Her shapely arms were bare, and there were no rings on the hand which she held out to the Prince, without rising. He lifted that hand to his lips, for he had always done so on former occasions.

"It is very good of you to have come, Prince," said she, gently, as he was performing this gallantry; I desired to ask your advice on a matter of great moment to me, and I have no one else whom I can consult. But first let me give you some tea; we shall both feel more sociable."

She slightly smiled as she said this, but her face was grave. As she rose and stood at the table, the Prince could not help admiring the perfect symmetry of her form and the innate grace of all her movements. She poured him out some tea, and when he had retreated to an arm-chair opposite hers, glided back to her own chair cup in hand. It then struck the Prince that he ought to have taken her cup and held it till she was seated, but he was in such a tremor to hear what she was going to say, that his solecism in manners escaped him till too late to be remedied.

"The death of Lady Pennywoddle has caused me great sadness," began Grace, with feeling. "She was very kind to me—almost a second mother, and I cannot yet realize the cruel loss which I have made."

The Prince bowed, and Grace passed over her eyes a handkerchief with a deep lace border.

"But now I cannot remain in Sir Ham's house," she continued. "Lady Jiddledubbin has invited me to stay with her, but I should have preferred to go and pass a few weeks with Lady Canonlaugh, whom I lately met, and who was very civil to me. Knowing that Lady Canonlaugh is not very well off, I had thought of indemnifying her if she would let me live under her protection, and chaperone me. And when I spoke to you this morning my purpose was to ask you if you would kindly bear my request to the Countess, with whom, I believe, you are intimate. Sir Ham, however, will not consent to this arrangement."

The Prince made a second more nervous bow, stirring his tea timidly. "I should have been delighted to speak to Lady Canonlaugh, Signorina—though I am not very intimate with her," added he, wondering whether there was intentional imputation in Grace's words.

"I thought you were very intimate," said Grace, with a furtive flash of jealousy in her large eyes; "but in any case Sir Ham will not hear of my staying with Lady Canonlaugh. He wants me to take a house and live there with my poor father and some paid companion. I should mention that Sir Ham has some right to direct my conduct, for I am to become his partner."

"His partner?" echoed the Prince, so astonished that he spilled a little tea into his saucer.

"Yes," said Grace, with composure. "Sir Ham considers that I had so much

to do with persuading him to undertake the Loan, that he yesterday tendered me a half share in all his profits. To-day, however, he made me another proposal, which was that he should settle on me as my absolute property all his landed estates, and his country house at Penny, together with twenty thousand pounds in money. He wished to effect this settlement before the Loan was issued, and it is about this that I wished to consult you"; here Grace paused and reddened a little. "Sir Ham had an object in proposing to settle his estates on me; he wished to keep me with him—for he has made me an offer of his hand."

Resolved as he was to retain a control over himself, the Prince spilled more tea in the saucer, and felt his hand shake. So here was the truth come out at last. In mentioning Sir Ham's offer, and in asking for Prince Casino's advice on it, Grace could have no object but to make the latter declare his own sentiments; and the Prince saw that he was now face to face with that dilemma and danger which had been tormenting him so wofully all day. In listening to Grace, the impression had been creeping over him—he knew not how—that Sir Ham was innocent of Lady Pennywoddle's murder, and that it was Grace who had managed it all. But in other respects Robgroschen's suspicions were all verified. Grace was going to get the Penny estates into her possession, so that they might be removed from all risks which Sir Ham might incur in the Loan; then she would marry Sir Ham with the intention of putting him out of the way as soon as possible, in order to marry him—the Prince.

Again, policemen without number appeared to loom up and compass this ill-starred Italian about. It seemed to him that if he encouraged Grace to marry Sir Ham, holding out the ulterior prospect of claiming her himself when she was a widow, it would be exactly as if he signed the poor knight's death-warrant. On the other hand, if he dissuaded her from the marriage, it would be tantamount to saying that he himself wished to marry her, and she might, with her devilish arts, drive him to make an explicit promise on the subject. If, however, he adopted the third alternative of advising her to marry Sir Ham, and yet letting her see that he had no wish to inherit the knight's reversion, what sudden explosion of wrath and vengeance might he not have to endure from this beautiful and criminal creature—this British incarnation of Lucretia Borgia? The cruelly-perplexed Prince thought he might perhaps back out of his scrape by common-places; but his heart sank into the heels of his boots as he whined: "Why, Signorina, should a person young and lovely as yourself marry an old man like Sir Pennywoddle?"

"Oh, if I become Sir Ham's wife, Prince, it would only be to devote myself to him as a daughter," answered Grace, who had been watching the play of the Prince's features during the half minute he took to puzzle out what he should say. "I should merely be actuated by a desire to cheer the close of the poor man's life, for he cannot live long."

The Prince gave a shiver. This was rather too much cynicism, and it revolted him. "But it seems to me that Sir Pennywoddle is full of health, Signorina," he faltered.

"I wish I thought so, Prince," sighed Grace. "The death of his wife has profoundly affected him, and he has grown strange in his behaviour. I sent for Lady Mayrose last night as soon as Lady Pennywoddle was dead, but Sir Ham refused to see her or his son-in-law, and Lady Mayrose remained by her dead mother's side alone. Sir Ham has confidence only in me, and I think that by great tenderness I could prolong his life for a few years; but I repeat, if it were not for me he would fret himself into death or insanity."

"He has great confidence in you indeed since he offers you his estates and so much money," exclaimed the Prince, mechanically, and with a tinge of irony not intended.

"He has offered me his estates, and I shall accept them, for if I refused he would be irritated and grieved," replied Grace, rising and laying down her cup. "As to the twenty thousand pounds, the advice I sought of you, Prince, was as regards the disposal of this money. It was you who urged the loan on me, and if Sir Ham thinks me entitled to a share in the large profits he is likely to make, a part of that share is due by rights to you. Excuse me for saying that I have latterly

heard that you are not rich. But you are young and ambitious. You have great talents, and with money could achieve a high position in your own country, or as a diplomatist in England or France. So I was going to beg your permission to offer the twenty thousand pounds to you; you have too much wit to scruple at a gift which you have fairly earned, and which you would accept without compunction from any person who bequeathed it you by will."

Now no Italian Prince has ever looked upon twenty thousand pounds with the eye of indifference. Rubino dei Casino felt as if the devil had got into the room and was tempting him through the mouth of this siren-like English girl. He likened himself to Marguerite cozened by Mephistopheles' jewels in the garden scene. His whole frame was in a fever as he gulped down the remainder of his tea, preparatory to stammering—

"But, Signorina, vat vil Lord Mayrose say to all this? He is Sir Pennywoddle's heir it seems to me, and might he not institute against us a suit *en captation*, for undue influence I zink you say?"

"Let Lord Mayrose not interfere with me, for I hate him," replied Grace, with an impetuosity as of flame. "Lord Mayrose had an opportunity of wiping out a stain on my poor father's honour, and he feared to do his duty lest it should injure his prospects. He is selfish and mean; a puritan in manner, and inwardly a small souled, mercenary adventurer. He married Mary Pennywoddle without loving her, and of late he has, as you know, been doing all he can to hinder Sir Ham in his enterprises and worry him. If Sir Ham had more than one child, I should hesitate to accept any large sum of money from him, but Mary Pennywoddle has already had a greater dower than would have been hers had her brother lived; and I have not the smallest scruple in receiving a gift which would now go to Lord Mayrose. Indeed, I will accept it on purpose that the money may not fall into such unworthy grasping hands as his."

"*Dio mio!* but Lord Mayrose is very powerful," objected Prince Casino, most uneasily, under this vehemence.

"One would think you were afraid of him," exclaimed Grace, with one of those exasperating laughs by which women can turn a sluggard's blood to fire. "From what I gathered of you yesterday, Lord Mayrose threatened and bullied you, but I should think any man of spirit would look upon this as a reason for reprisals! Be assured of this, Prince, that when a person of your rank accepts an insult without avenging it, he is lost, so far as honour and social position are concerned. Once you allow one of these English noblemen to place his heel on your neck, you will find others abandon you as if you were leprosy; but get money enough to defy them and they will cringe to you—they respect nothing else."

This was pretty much what Robgroschen had said to him, and as the Prince recalled Mayrose's menaces, the cold shoulder at the "Brummel," and Lord Chevy-chase's cool desertion of him, he saw that if he wished to remain in England he must, indeed, pick up both heart and money. Nay, he could not hope to make a figure even in his own country or in France if he left England with a stigma upon his name, for there is a wondrous freemasonry nowadays among the best aristocracies of European countries. The Prince rose, and brusquely pushed his cup on to the velvet covering of the mantlesheaf, then leaned an arm on the shelf, and running his hand over his throbbing brow, exclaimed excitedly, with a gnashing of his white teeth—

Yes, Signorina, Lord Mayrose, he did insult me, and I would give my blood for a revenge. But I have something on my mind. I am distracted, I dare not speak."

He hesitated, and munched his moustache in anxiety. Up to the previous few minutes the conversation with Grace had been conducted with a coldness which excluded sentiment. But since her outburst against Mayrose, Grace's tone had warmed, and her eyes looking straight into his, magnetised him as those of a charmer do the snake. His weak nature was melting and bending under the rays of her eyes, whilst his senses were stimulated by her impassive beauty. Why should not he, after all, link his love to this peerless girl, who was so strong and brave, and could serve him so well in his ambition? That he loved her less than

she loved him would be an advantage, as it would prevent her from wholly mastering him. But then there was the murder; and here be it said that Italians feel little abhorrence for murder in the abstract. Practiced as a fine art with *aqua tofana* or a finely-wrought stiletto planted deftly (and at night, with nobody looking on) under the fifth rib, it even makes them smile, for they are a people not void of humour. What Prince Casino loathed was the consequences of murder as exacted in Britain—that peculiar perfume of blue dye which exudes from policemen's tunics, the trial before twelve unintelligent meat salesmen culled out of Cheapside, and the black cap perched on the wig of such a one as Lord Chief Henburn, with whom the Prince had conversed more than once in society, and who struck him as the last man to appreciate fine-art cultivated at the expense of Queen Victoria's lieges. The Prince also dreaded this, that if he married a girl who for his sake had committed murder, she might one day, if she detected him in an infidelity (and Italians are conspicuously liable to such), apostrophise him in those significant words of Lucrezia's, which made the Duke of Ferrara's blood run cold:—"Guarda a voi, il mio quarto marito!" All this bubbled through the Prince's head as he leaned against the mantel-shelf, rumpling his hair and biting his lips. At last further reticence became too painful to him. He determined to unbosom himself and learn the truth at any cost. He turned and abruptly faced Grace:—

"Signorina, I—I must speak out. You must be indignant and load me with your reproaches, but I cannot help it. Some people suspect you of having murdered Milady Pennywoddle. Two men have told me so—Robgroschen and Mr. Dexter. You see I give you their names." And Prince Casino impulsively narrated all that these two gentlemen had said to him, occupying about ten minutes in the dramatic recital. Now, what can I zink of all this?" he concluded, wretchedly. "It perplexes me, and I am verree miserable."

Grace never moved a muscle. She sat looking at the Prince, without the hue of her face once changing.

"And you believe this?" she inquired with disdainful haughtiness, when he had finished.

"No—o," stuttered the Prince, already afraid of what he had done.

"You seem half to believe it," she replied contemptuously. Well, if you have no more faith in my principles, at least do justice to my common sense. The death of Lady Pennywoddle was the worst thing that could happen to me. Sir Ham had offered me half his fortune before she died; and had she lived I should have been rich and free to marry a man of my choice. But now gratitude obliges me to become the wife of Sir Ham, for if I refused to do so I should kill him as deliberately as if I put a pistol to his brow."

"He cannot expect such a sacrifice as that of you," submitted the Prince, considerably relieved by Grace's words.

"He does expect it, and I will devote myself to him," retorted Grace. "I only sent for you, Prince, to offer the money your services have merited; and now I think we have done. A friend of mine, Mr. Leech, is going to see whether my father is fit to be removed from the care of the doctors who have been attending him; and if so, I shall take a house and wait until Sir Ham's year of widowhood is over. If not, I shall go and live with Lady Jiddledubbin; for I presume you shrink from seeing a girl whom you suspect of murder intrude herself under the roof of your intimate friend, Lady Canonlaugh."

"Vy do you reproach me with Lady Canonlaugh, since I say nozink to you about zat Mr. Leech?" responded the Prince, whose emotion was now passed away. "I have seen Leech at parties sighing after you like a furnace. He is a nice young man vis large ears and a face like a caricature by my friend M. Cham."

"Mr. Leech has a heart of gold, and is chivalrous enough not to insult women!" ejaculated Grace, indignantly. "If I were to ask him to avenge me against accusations such as you have brought against me, he would do so with a promptitude which would astonish you."

"Tut, tut! zat is bravura," laughed the Prince; and contritely he approached Grace with his hands outstretched, like one who pleads for pardon.

The fact is, there had been a ring of truth in Grace's defence of herself, and it

had established her innocence in the Prince's eyes. He was, therefore, sedulous now to make his peace, and began by murmuring with his silvery tongue a few coaxing appeals, which at first she rebuffed with scorn. But so strong as she was with those for whom she cared nothing, Grace Marvell was weak against this perfumed Italian, who had enthralled her heart and whose love she aspired to win; and he, perceiving it, coolly resumed his power, and cajoled her with some of those flatteries which, whether they be breathed by Italian Prince or Lazzarone, have all the balmy warmth of the poetic South in them. He treated her, as he did most women, like a spoilt child; but when he saw that she continued angry, he penitently knelt at her feet, and with a quiet force took possession of her hands, putting himself in the same suppliant posture as Sir Ham had done the day before—but what a difference there was between the two scenes!

"Carina," he murmured most melodiously, "you must not marry that old man, for you know that I love you—I never suspected how much till this day!—and I will be your husband."

"Never! I do not want your love," said she, retreating.

"Not a love that will worship you every hour, and try to make of your life a foretaste of Paradise?"

"A love that suspects me of murder?"

"I should not care if you murdered. Stab me with those soft, small hands, and I will be glad," protested he, naively. "Yes, carina, we will be married, and be rich, and happier than you can dream. I will get some diplomatic post which will make me more than the equal of these English lords, and then you you shall come with me to France and my own country, where people will adore you; and they will say that never was a princess of our race so fair, though we are a long line, carina. My ancestor got his title six centuries since from Charles of Anjou, while the ancestors of your puddle-blooded commercial peers begged for pence in the highways."

"What does all that matter to me? I should not care to bear the name of a man who did not trust me more than father or mother or anything on earth," replied Grace, still angrily.

"I have no father or mother, carina; but who can trust you more than I do! You will be my wife, my beautiful Grace, will you not? Say 'yes'!"

"No," said Grace, with spirit.

Now when a woman says "No" with spirit, it always means "Yes"; so the Prince, with an unheeding smile, resumed:

"You will leave Sir Pennywoddle's house as you said, my darling, and live with your father. We will take a house in Park Lane—a bijou Palace—and I will come to visit you there every day, and in six months we will become one for ever. Say 'yes'!" and this adjuration he repeated in all the tones of his persuasive octave till Grace found herself powerless to falter "No," and so relented.

"But what shall I do about Sir Ham?" she murmured in distress, yet with the thrilling joy of triumph, as the Prince stroked her hand and gazed devotedly into her eyes.

"You will get the estates from Sir Ham and sell them," answered the Prince, tenderly. "We must have as much hard money as we can to invest where we please. Sir Ham will be rich enough via his Loan profits, and since he has no children but Lady Mayrose, I agree that we can accept his gift without scruple. As to marrying you, that is sheer nonsense, carina; you does not throw a white rose into the bosom of an old man. He must bear it as he can. Say you will obey me, carina, eh?"

Grace murmured something unintelligible, for a languor was stealing over her. Prince Casino, however, was just the man to have taken advantage of this to make her exhibit more weakness than she cared to show, so she made an effort to disengage herself from him:—"It is one o'clock, Prince; we will talk of this some other day," she said. "You must go now, for you may awake Sir Ham, whose room is below this: and remember that poor Lady Pennywoddle is still in the house."

The Prince dropped a kiss on to each of her hands. The thought of Sir Ham's

sleep had little weight with him, but the idea that there was a dead body in the house did slightly chill him. Besides, there was no reason for prolonging the interview. Grace was his. When he had taken up his hat and approached her to take leave, he encircled her waist with his arm, and breathed something inaudible into her ear. She blushed, and let her head droop on his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"O' THAT WAY 'MADNESS LIES!"

As Grace had told the Prince, she had asked Quilpin Leech to remove her father from the private madhouse where he was confined, in order that she might live under his seeming protection until the time came for her settling in life. Leech, who had never ceased to visit the old man regularly once a week, prepared to effect his liberation on the first Sunday after Grace's exchange of troth with the Italian.

He chose Sunday because that day was all his own; but for civility's sake he came down to Mayrose's study after breakfast, and asked whether he could be of any service to him or Lady Mayrose. It was often Leech's habit to escort Mary to St. George's when Mayrose was too busy to perform the duty; and he liked his function well, though it obliged him to sit out sermons whose amazing dullness made him moan.

Mayrose thanked his secretary, but said he should not want him; "Lady Mayrose is going down to Elmwood to-day to stay with Lady Rosemary, so you and I shall be alone in the house, Leech, till the end of the season."

"I hope Lady Mayrose is not too much cast down by her affliction," observed Leech, sympathisingly.

"She is better, thanks," said Mayrose; "but Lady Rosemary has kindly invited her to the country, and it is better she should be out of town now that she cannot go into society."

Mayrose spoke in a dejected tone, for the death of his mother-in-law, which would compel Mary to live for a year in seclusion, was a most untoward event to him. He could not, considering Sir Ham's grief, carry out the threat he had made of denouncing the Loan in the *Gazette*, nor could he with propriety set up Mr. Moulder in the Commons, and Lord Moulder in the Lords, to ask those questions respecting the recognition of Rio-Brigande, which would enable him publicly to repudiate any participation of his own in the affair. So Society would continue to identify him with the Loan, and gloss and tattle with the greater malice as Mary would be no longer present in the drawing-rooms to stand up for him with her sturdy little tongue.

It had been Lady Rosemary's suggestion that Mary should come down and stay at Elmwood; and Zellie was to go and reside with her sister Violet during the visit. But meanwhile the city editors of most of the papers were in the full cry of interested praise over Rio-Brigande, and Mayrose was haunted by the daily-increasing presentiment that his career was shortly going to end in disaster, and this irrespective of its being brought to a close by Lord Hornette, should the latter continue to brave him and render the threatened duel necessary. Mayrose was not like a man being dragged away by a headlong team which human skill can direct and perhaps check at the last moment; he was like one being hurried on towards an abyss by an express train—a brute force uncontrollable.

"By the way," he said, as Leech was going out, "I asked you the other day if you would find out how matters stood between Miss Marvell and Prince Casino. I suppose you've not had time?"

"No; Lady Pennywoddle's death occurred the same day."

"Quite so. Well, it's not of much consequence. I suspect the girl of other designs now than those I had first imagined."

"Other designs?"

"We shall see. She has done me a great deal of harm already, and will do me much more, I apprehend, before she has finished. Since you once had a fancy

for the girl, Leech, I am glad for your sake that it came to nothing, for she is a bad, bold person, who would have led you an unhappy life."

Quilpin Leech went away not a little shocked by this remark. So far from his passion for Grace being a thing of the past, he had been wondering through half the previous night whether Lady Pennywoddle's death would not help him, by softening Grace and leading her to see that riches were of no great account after all, since they could not save one from sudden death in the midst of every enjoyment. This piece of moralising was not much in Leech's ordinary way; but true love makes one philosophical, and it distressed the Secretary to find that the perfections which he saw in Grace were not so visible to Mayrose. He could not help attributing this to one of those unaccountable obliquities of vision by which worthy people often come to hate other worthy people—freaks of Nature, moral squints which bring about miserable messes, and are a proof of man's erring condition here below. Pondering over all this, Leech started for Dr. Rogur's "Private Home for the Mentally Afflicted," and reached that philanthropic institution just about the hour when the mentally afflicted were rising from dinner.

Dr. Rogur's house stood in a picturesque suburb, and was embowered in shrubbery and flowers. There was nothing in it to mark the asylum, for, looked at in front, it resembled the country mansion of an enriched merchant, and seen from behind, with its park of tall elms and acacias, it was like the lordly demesne of a nobleman fond of privacy; a high wall ran around the grounds and masked the roots of the trees from view. In answer to Quilpin Leech's ring, a staid servant in black appeared, and led the secretary at once across the hall, and into a garden filled with sunlight, geraniums, and roses. A shaggy black terrier and a pair of parrots, red and grey, were disporting themselves on a gravel walk in harmonious promiscuity, and a tall middle-aged man, with a grizzled black beard, and a velvet skull cap, was stooping and feeding some skinny pullets out of a saucer. This friend of fowl kind was Dr. Rogur, a man of wondrously bland ways, in whose mouth butter would have kept as cool as in an ice-house. He rose, holding the saucer, and with the pullets opening their beaks squeakingly around him, and extended a hand, soft and warm to the touch as a boiled vegetable: "How do you do, Mr. Leech, you have come to see our dear patient?"

"I have come to remove him, if possible, doctor," answered Quilpin Leech, squeezing the proffered hand diffidently, as if afraid that half of it would remain between his fingers under the form of pulp. "Miss Marvell is making arrangements to take a house, and have her father attended to at home."

Dr. Rogur's features became piteous, and he looked as if he were going to cry over the pullets' food in the saucer. His affection for his dear patients was such that he was always loth to part with them, and this aversion was particularly acute in the case of those who brought him £300 a year, as this one did.

"I am really afraid that it would be unsafe to remove poor Mr. Marvell," said he in dissuading tones. "He is suffering from the most dangerous of all manias, that of persecution. He fancies there are conspiracies afoot against him. He hears voices mocking him, and imagines he has a grievance. Such symptoms often culminate in homicidal impulses, and the patient requires the most anxious watching."

"Do you think, then, that he is incurable?"

"I would not answer for his cure if he were taken from my care," was Dr. Rogur's plaintive, but able answer. "The great point in these cases is not to interrupt the continuity of treatment. I am attentively observing Mr. Marvell at this moment to see whether his malady will resolve itself into general paralysis or confirmed dementia; but such diagnoses are always long, and until they are over it is incautious to indulge in prognostications."

"Well, poor Marvell has so often implored me to have him liberated that, as he has now been more than a year under your care, I fancy change of scene and freedom from restraint might perhaps do him good," submitted Leech deferentially, for he felt a great respect towards Dr. Rogur.

"Ah! entreaties for freedom; these patients are all alike!" exclaimed Dr. Rogur, flourishing his saucer pathetically skywards, as if to take Heaven to witness

of the perversity of lunatics. "All patients wish to be freed, my dear sir; it is one of the most perplexing characteristics of their affliction."

"Do you mean, then, that it would be characteristic of a sane man to desire remaining in confinement?" asked Quilpin Leech, with astonished irony.

At this Dr. Rogur smiled, for he was a man of the world enough to turn off into a joke any question difficult to face. He said Mr. Leech should see the patient himself according to his wont; and went to a wall, where he pulled three times a metallic resonant bell. A head-keeper in plain clothes arrived, and touched his forelock to Leech as an old acquaintance. After a renewed and dismal warning from Dr. Rogur as to the heavy responsibilities incurred by those who interrupt the medical treatment of lunatics, Leech followed the keeper through a small door to his left, and found himself in Ward B of the Asylum.

It was by a favour not often accorded that Leech was allowed to enter the ward, for there was a regulation that patients should see their friends in special rooms in the private parts of the house. The asylum numbered about seventy male patients, some of them mad, others harmlessly imbecile, and others not mad at all. This last set comprised old gentlemen of irritable temper who had become obnoxious to their nearest relatives, other old gentlemen with fortunes who had evinced inclination to marry their house-keepers, and whom their heirs had confined in order that their prospective inheritances might not come to naught through such matrimonial indulgences; misbehaved youngsters, again, whom their guardians found it too much trouble to try and reclaim, and accordingly placed under Dr. Rogur's care in the hope that death might relieve them of their harassing anxieties; and lastly, obstreperous persons who happened to possess annoying secrets regarding big people. Our faultless British Constitution has taken minute care that no one shall be caged in a public prison without trial; but it has overlooked the life-long imprisonment and the slow death that may be inflicted upon any friendless man under the simple warrant of two doctors—no matter what doctors.

It is true that inspectors periodically visit all asylums. Punctually once in every three months a pair of curious functionaries swooped down on Dr. Rogur's, and the better to assure themselves that all things were properly conducted paid their visits at fixed dates, so that Dr. Rogur and his household might be duly prepared for their coming. Pencil in hand these gentlemen strolled through the wards, and if any patient remonstrated against his confinement, alleging himself sane, the inspectors took polite note of his observations, but once the patient's back turned, Dr. Rogur had his formula cut and dried:—"You have seen that poor fellow in one of his lucid intervals," he would say, with commiseration, "and in their lucid intervals these lunatics are often much more rational than sane people; but you should have seen the unfortunate man a week ago when his last attack was on him!"

There is nothing to say in answer to such a way of putting facts. The inspectors have not time to sit down round a lunatic and watch him every day for three months to see whether he is liable to attacks: and as they are pestered by innumerable genuine lunatics all protesting their sanity, they readily confound one occasionally reasonable man with the mass of others who are not so. This is all the easier to do as there are few men so iron of nerve as to be able when unjustly immured among madmen to state their case without displaying some excitement or emotion—and these displays are generally set down as indications of the malady which the petitioner denies. Moreover, it is not enough that a case should be composedly stated: it must be credible and acceptable to official ears. The man who begins by saying that he was never mad at all brings thereby a criminal charge against the two doctors who confined him, and throws away all chances of a hearing. The inspectors are surfeited with lunatic recitals of odious conspiracies and mercenary doctors; and on principle they decline to entertain any accounts which, proved, would subject the accused doctors to a sentence of penal servitude. The alleged lunatic's only chance of release consists in admitting that he was perhaps insane when he was first confined, but that he has been cured and is now fit to take care of himself. If he has fortitude enough to swallow this pill, it may be

that at the end of a year or so—that is, when they have conversed with him at three or four of their visits and found him invariably cool, gentle, and rational—the inspectors may begin to take an interest in him; but the success of this experiment is by no means certain, for the inspectors often change, so that a man might well have to wait for years before he saw the same inspectors three times. And besides, when a man whom it is strongly wished to detain remains obstinately sane and self-possessed, such gentlemen as Dr. Rogur have plenty of means of throwing him opportunely off his balance. There are drugs enough in the pharmacopœia, which administered in thoughtful doses about the time of an inspection, will bring on febrile excitement just as violent as may be needed.

Sometimes a wrongly-supposed madman will take French leave of his asylum, but in such cases the police of the three kingdoms may hunt him as a lunatic at large, and if he be caught his prospects are not bettered by his flight. The magistrate before whom he is brought for re-commitment may be struck by the shrewdness of his answers; he has no power to release him, and can only advise him to make an appeal to the Commissioners in Lunacy—these said Commissioners being accustomed to judge of a petitioner's sanity almost solely by the reports of the doctors who confined him, and by those of the physicians of the asylum whence he fled. As to all these doctors it may be remarked that people now and then came to Dr. Rogur wishing to confine a dear but objectionable kinsman of theirs, and yet not knowing where to find the two medical men who are required to sign the certificate. But Dr. Rogur knew—indeed he had a pair of medical friends who made a point of signing as many certificates as he needed, and who received a commission of so much per cent. on all the patients whom they lodged in his asylum. This, it should be added, is an established custom in the medical profession. Dr. Conolly, who did for the reform of lunatic asylums in England what Mackintosh did for the improvement of the criminal code and of the prison system, does not scruple to own in his memoirs that he received commissions on almost all the patients whom he sent to asylums.

To sum up these casual observations, therefore, the laws which relate to the methods of determining lunacy and to the custody of lunatics require a little looking into. Since it is necessary for the safety of society that lunatics should be placed under restraint, lunatic asylums should, like prisons, be in charge of the Government, and all the physicians in them should be paid by salary and have no pecuniary interest whatever in the detention of patients. For so long as irresponsible physicians are allowed under pretences of philanthropy to open private asylums which are simply commercial speculations, so long will there be abuses more or less startling. In houses like that of Dr. Rogur the three-fold object is to get as many patients as possible, to make them pay largely, and to give them the smallest amount of care and comfort for their money.

Coming back now to old Mr. Marvell, we may admit that he was thoroughly mad. He had not been altogether so when first confined, but rage had crazed him as it does many others. His lunacy had taken the form of a monomania, making him imagine that the whole official world of England were in league to persecute him; notwithstanding which he foresaw that he should be righted some day by a stupendous trial which should rouse up all Britain in his favour, enable him to recover monstrous damages from Government, and reinstate him in the office of which he had been deposed by Mr. Keane-Midge. To obtain money for the expenses of this trial was his main pre-occupation, and he spent his days writing quires of gibberish under the impression that he was doing a grand "History of Persecution in All Ages," which would sell to the extent of a hundred editions, and bring him £20,000. He was fairly well-fed and lodged, but this was owing to Quilpin Leech's visits, and not to any diligence of his daughter's on his behalf. Patients in private asylums are attended to or neglected in proportion as they have friends who appear to care for them, and are generous in feeing the keepers. Now Leech, guessing how entirely an insane man must be dependent on the kindness of his attendants, left frequent veils in the hands of the head-keeper, and of the minor attendant with whom Mr. Marvell shared with half a dozen other lunatics, one Gurdles.

This Gurdles—a pug-faced person—was seated in Mr. Marvell's room sucking his thumbs when Leech entered. It was a decent apartment, differing in no wise from an ordinary lodging-house sitting-room, except that there was a thin wire grating before the window, and Mr. Marvell was seated at a table near this window, and writing with the same unabated frenzy as when he lived at Mrs. Legge's in Surrey-street. He was satisfactorily dressed, however, and in honour of Sunday had a clean shirt on (the usual allowance for patients unvisited was one a week). He rose on seeing Leech, and walked forward with alacrity, but in a not undignified manner, to shake his hand; at the same time he motioned to Gurdles to retire.

"How do you do, my only friend," he said, with fervour; "your coming is like sunshine to me. God bless you for bearing with a morose captive's whims and crooked temper. But all this will soon be over, Leech, very soon—freedom and redress can't be for ever delayed."

"No, and they'll come even sooner than you expect, I trust," said Leech, cheerily, as he took a seat and drew some parcels from his pockets.

"Well, not sooner than I expect, for I count on being free in a few days, Leech. I've my plan, my good friend. Listen——" And the old man, shambling to the door, opened it with cunning suddenness to see that Gurdles was not listening outside; but, Gurdles being innocent of such a trick, he resumed:—"My plan's this, my good friend: I'll escape, for I've found the means. A man can release himself when he sets his mind on it, and when I'm free I'd first have my revenge on those who've put me here, and then institute my great suit against the Crown. By the way, have you brought my proofs?"

"Yes," said Leech, laying one of the parcels on the table; and it was surely a fine sense of charity in this eccentric youth which had led him to have all the desolate lunatic's lucubrations printed from week to week. Dr. Rogur pretended that this excited the patient, who had much better be left alone without receiving visits; but as a matter of fact these proofs had given poor Mr. Marvell some belief in himself and hope in the future. For more than a year they had kept despair and raving outbreaks, perhaps suicide, from him.

The monomaniac clutched at the proofs and unfolded them, gloating over the unconnected, rambling paragraphs with an author's exultation. "God bless you again, Leech—God bless you! It's not Grace who'd have done this for me. If it hadn't been for you, my friend, this place would have been a hell, and must have killed me long ago! See those lunatics through the window here in the garden—stark mad all of them? Some of them keep me awake at nights; others swear at me and insult me when I walk among them for exercise. Well it's Grace who had me put in this ward. There's another ward for first-class patients, where I might have been almost alone, with a bright room, a fine view to cheer me, and with a companion or two who are convalescent. There I might have forgotten that I was in prison; but it's she who objected to it, alleging that I might escape, though her real reason was that I should be too comfortable; for she wants to see me dead, Leech, in my coffin, safely nailed down, and never able to trouble her more."

"Come, come, Mr. Marvell, don't say such things as that," pleaded Leech, lightly again. "Here are some cigars for you, and the illustrated weeklies. Take heart; your troubles will soon end, and you'll find that Miss Marvell has never desired anything but your good."

The old man took a cigar, bit the end off fiercely, and with growing excitement, ejaculated—

"That's all stuff, my good friend—arrant stuff! You think I don't know all she's brewing against me, and how she means to keep me here for life! If it weren't for the money you give Gurdles and the other keepers, they would tell me to my face; as it is, they speak of it behind my back, but I overhear them. Of an evening when they sit down below smoking their pipes, I've crept half-way down the stairs and listened to them. They talk about the house of old Rogur, of my daughter's occasional visits to him—though she never asks for me and they've said over and over again that I'm here for life. Well, I don't wonder at it, for I knew the jade's schemes;" he broke off with a feverish exasperation which brought a cat-like gleam into his eyes—"yes, Leech, I know it all! She placed me here that I

might never be able to bring my suit against the Crown and get damages from Government. It was her paramour who prompted her to that course—the oily, plausible villain—that Mayrose, you know, who duped you into thinking he was going to take up my case.”

“Mayrose, Grace’s paramour!” exclaimed Leech, forgetting he was with a madman in the utter stupefaction these words caused him.

“Aye, aye, I know what I’m saying,” answered the old man doggedly, as he ran round his armchair like a wild beast. “The minx disgraced herself—she sold her father’s honour to her gallant—and the wages of sin will fall on her like God’s thunder!”

“Why, Grace—Miss Marvell—is said to hate Lord Mayrose,” gasped Quilpin Leech, horrified.

“She makes you think so perhaps,” replied Mr. Marvell curtly; “but you remember that day when she went out in her finest clothes to plead my cause before that rascal with her own lips, as she said. Well, she came back with an altered air, and she was never the same girl afterwards. I knew she was in love—girls can conceal everything but that! She had probably thought to dazzle that debauched peer with her beauty and become his wife. But it was he who enslaved and seduced her. If he has spurned her now it is because he has induced her to do all he wanted—that is, put me out of the way of harming the Government—and has no further use for such a worthless baggage. But for all that I’ll be even with him, Leech!” hissed the old man, bringing his face so close to Leech’s that his hot breath came like the blast of a stove—“Yes, I’ll murder the scoundrel! And I’ll murder her, and that fiend Keane-Midge! I’ll do it as soon as I’ve escaped, and as sure as there’s a God above us! And when I’m tried for it I’ll tell the jury my whole story without lawyers’ aid, and they’ll acquit me! so help me heaven, where there’s justice for the oppressed.”

After this it was worse than dangerous to think of releasing Mr. Marvell. In the evening Quilpin Leech arrived in Kensington with a letter which he had asked Dr. Rogur to write, not liking to convey the contents himself orally; and this letter he gave to Grace. She read it calmly, and when she had got to the end looked up unmoved. “It seems my father would murder me if set at liberty,” she said; then, after reflecting for a few moments: “Well, as he is incurable, I must make other arrangements. I shall go and live with Lady Canonlaugh.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE IMPENDING DUEL.

Quilpin Leech thought it useless to tell Mayrose of his visit to the asylum, and of the menacing purport of Mr. Marvell’s ravings. He considered that the poor maniac was well guarded by Dr. Rogur, and that his escape need not consequently be apprehended.

Nevertheless, love being over jealous, the secretary could not help conning over the wild things Mr. Marvell had said. He was persuaded that they must be mere phantasies of a disordered brain; and yet he recollected that some time back he had overheard two men at his club—the Tabboo—discuss the scandal which the Boudoir Cabal had circulated at the time when Mayrose had taken up Mr. Marvell’s case in defiance of the Midge—that scandal, namely, which alleged Grace Marvell to be Mayrose’s mistress. Quilpin Leech was not one of those men who when they hear a lady of their acquaintance lightly spoken of, start up and bawl, “The lady in question is the purest of her sex, and I place her honour under my protection?” He knew that such outbursts do more harm than good, and, as the talk of the two scandal-mongers had not been intended for his ears, he contented himself with shrugging his shoulders. Now, however, he found himself uneasily wondering whether Grace’s aversion for Mayrose could really be inspired by a feminine pique consequent upon some advances of hers having been rejected. Trusting wholly and chivalrously in her purity he tried to laugh away the notion;

but jealousy is not to be mocked off, and the more he tried to laugh the more obstinately did misgivings intrude upon him.

He would have cut his tongue off, however, sooner than breathe a word of his doubts to Mayrose; for he was convinced that, whatever might have been Miss Marvell's sentiments, Mayrose's feeling towards Grace had always been those of complete indifference; and the idea that Mayrose could have trifled even for a moment with Grace was to him preposterous. Leech sincerely liked and respected his cousin, who treated him much like a brother, and took every occasion of befriending him and his family. It has already been said that although Mayrose professed to hate nepotism, and really did so where others were concerned, he did not hold that in recognizing the merits of his own relatives he acted as a nepotist, and accordingly several of Quilpin's brothers had been installed by him one after another in small posts of emolument. The Fulham Leeches, Mayrose's erstwhile hostile kinsmen, had also picked up a few plums which the African Secretary had thrown in their way, rather to show that he bore them no grudge than because of their proved worthiness to live on the public monies; and, as to Quilpin himself, Mayrose talked of nothing less than inducing Mr. Keane-Rodent, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the African Office, to retire on a pension and a K.C.B.-ship, and putting Leech in his place. Considering that this piece of preferment would give Leech an easy berth of £1,500 for life, and much improve his position, as he fondly hoped, in the eyes of Grace, the Secretary—though, of course, disliking nepotism too—had every cause to feel grateful.

So he kept his peace, and went about his duties as industriously as usual during the days following the last-recorded events, and whilst other events, interesting to his cousin and to himself, proceeded on their course. Poor Lady Pennywoddle was pompously buried; a few days afterwards the Rio-Brigande Loan was at length issued; and meantime Grace left Sir Ham's house to go and live with Lady Canonlaugh—a step which distressed Leech, for he could no longer visit her, and run obediently on her errands. He had little leisure, however, to give way to his distress, for now the London season was speeding to its end; the Universal Suffrage Bill had well-nigh got through committee in the House of Commons; the debate and anxiously expected tussle in the Lords was approaching, and Mayrose devoted a good deal of time to preparing his speech with his secretary, the latter's help consisting of something more than notes.

The two lived all alone in the big house, being continually together now that Mary was gone; and as Mayrose wished his speech—or rather speeches, for he would probably have to deliver more than one—to be better than mere improvisation, he adopted a practice familiar to orators in the past, and rehearsed his arguments, with Leech sitting by to play the part of refuter. Leech had a keen scent for sophistry, and while Mayrose paced to and fro, declaiming in language more or less vehement, Quilpin would prick up his ears, and cut in occasionally with pointed rejoinders, demolishing a period more ornate than sound. It was strenuous work, and the colloquies between the statesman and his secretary were often as quick and vigorous as a hotly-played game of racquets; but Leech had to argue now on the Tory side, now on the Radical; and as he acquitted himself rather better in the former capacity than in the latter, Mayrose would sometimes say with a smile, "You would be a gain to the True Blues if they had you in the house," whereat Leech would answer mildly, "Radicalism requires a twistful sort of logic—it isn't easy to argue straight for a party who do not know what they want, and will never be satisfied till they get it."

Well, one morning as Leech came down to the study for one of these bouts, he was surprised to find Mayrose displaying a blue document on the writing-table, and the butler standing by expectant, with a quill in his hand:—"I want you and Ashmore kindly to witness my will," said Mayrose quietly.

The butler and the secretary each appended their signature as desired; when they had done so Ashmore retired, and Mayrose folded up his will, putting it in a large envelope, which he sealed in five places. This done he thought a minute, then locked the packet in his desk, and taking up a bundle of detached papers, exclaimed in the tone of one who wants to drive absorbing thoughts away: "Now

for our rehearsal ; just follow me with these notes, please, and see whether I have got up my historical precedents correctly. I shall not probably require to trouble you about my speech again after this morning," and saying this Mayrose began to recite some arguments in a voice which was at first measured, but which gradually grew faster and warmed.

Leech listened mechanically for a few minutes, turning over the notes and verifying dates as Mayrose uttered them ; but soon he felt as if something within him was stirred, and he looked up.

It was a singular scene—the Minister speaking as though he were addressing a crowded house, and the secretary hearkening with an attention full of gravity. But there was admiration in this attention, for never had Mayrose so exerted himself—never had his subject seemed so thoroughly to possess him. His arguments were delivered in sequence strongly linked, his images were forcible, his language was terse, natural, and elegant ; and rose at the peroration to the highest order of eloquence. Leech had long ceased following the notes when Mayrose finished, and he clapped his hands with unfeigned enthusiasm :—" Bravo ! only it's *margaritas ante porcum* : it is a sheer waste to have made such a speech before one alone !"

" Do you think it will do ?" said Mayrose indifferently, as he passed his handkerchief over his brow. " Well I want the speech to be good, for I dare say it will be the last I shall ever make, at least as a Minister."

" Why so ?" asked Leech, nodding his interrogatory wisp of hair.

Mayrose glanced at him keenly.

" Have you not heard of the affair between myself and Lord Hornette ?"

" I have heard nothing."

" Really ? Then secrets are better kept than I should have thought. Well, at the end of the session I shall most likely have to resign to fight a duel with Lord Hornette. That is why I have been making my will."

Leech listened in the profoundest amazement while Mayrose informed him of this duel and explained that it was to be a *bona fide* combat, though he gave none of the reasons which had brought the fight about. " It's a foolish business," added he, with a sad smile ; " and I rely upon you to say nothing about it to anybody. But I have told you because you are my relative, and because I want you to do me a service. If I am killed you will open that desk there where the will is, and you will find a letter addressed to a lady. You will take it, please, and give it into the lady's own hands and keep the matter for ever secret. May I rely on you ?"

" You may rely on me for anything," faltered Leech, standing up, and scarcely able to believe what he heard. But—but—there is surely no danger ?"

" Oh, I hope not," replied Mayrose, with an effort to talk lightly, " but it is always well to take one's precautions, so here is a duplicate key of my desk"—he unfastened a small gold key from his watch ring as he said this—" and remember that you will speak of the letter in question to no one—not even to my wife."

" To no one," repeated Leech, with an emotion which rendered him almost inarticulate.

" Thanks," said Mayrose, with seeming relief. " And now don't look downhearted, for plenty of people have outlived duels. I must be off for the present to see what mischief Mr. Keane-Rodent has been doing during the night. You may trust me to get you put into that gentleman's place before I go ; and in sooth I should die the happier for having discomfited at least one of the Midge connection during my stay in office."

He smiled as he nodded to his secretary in going out ; but Quilpin Leech sat with his hair all standing, and in anything but a mood for smiling. It was quite true that he had heard nothing about the duel, and this for the sufficient reason that secrets of this sort are not easily bruited in England. Abroad, in countries which are supposed to enjoy no liberty of the press, a fracas between a great noble and a Cabinet Minister would quickly have found its way into all the papers ; but in these isles the press is free to the extent of discussing nothing that concerns the doings of important people, and there was not a London journal of repute would have dared to insert a rumour which would have instantly brought down a flat contradiction from the interested parties, and much public animadversion into the

bargain. Even in society people were chary of believing the vague report of sundry whisperers; for Lords Beaujolais and Balbie Drone and little Sir Tito Tumb avouched that there had been nothing more than a mere tiff of words between Mayrose and the Earl, and few sober persons deemed it credible that an English Minister and a Duke's eldest son truly intended to fight like Frenchmen, Irishmen, or savages.

It was thus that Zellie Carol had heard nothing of the quarrel that had arisen for her sake, although she was living with her sister, who knew all the details and privately revelled in them. Violet made a prudent point of never alluding to Mayrose or Lord Hornette in Zellie's presence, and yet this duel secret was one that burned her young lips, and she would talk so often of duels to these and those of her friends, just to see whether they would hint at their knowledge of coming strife, that she ended by doing so in the hearing of Zellie on the very day when Mayrose had disclosed the matter to Quilpin Leech.

It was at a ball given by the ex-Chamberlain, Lord Uphill; for since her recovery Zellie had taken to attending all the entertainments of fashion, and many inferred from this that she had entered the marriage-market again. The truth was, however, that she had been going to parties solely in the hope of meeting Mayrose there; and since Lady Pennywoddle's death, she had gone in the hope that she might hear him spoken of. What he would have said to him had they met she knew not; but her longing to see him was as intense as his own yearning, though resolutely-contained, desire to see her.

The ball was strikingly over-crowded, and Zellie had just danced a waltz with one of the must pushing among the new adorers—the polo loving, fox-chasing, Hurlingham-frequenting Earl of Heigho—when in trying to get back to her seat, she and her partner were stopped by a throng emerging from another room, and found themselves behind Violet, who was chatting with Mr. Dexter. The editor and ex-M.P. had been introduced to both the sisters in the course of the season; and there was nothing extraordinary that he should be in converse with a marchioness, for he got on famously with everybody worth knowing.

"What a crush there always is at these balls!" Violet was saying, as she gathered up her wide-spreading skirts; "and then everybody pushes so! I really believe, Mr. Dexter, that gentlemen are much more uncouth since duelling has been abolished."

"Ladies ought to revive duelling—it was a great protection to them," concurred the editor, smiling.

"Yes; but the penalties are so dreadful! They do shocking things to people who fight, do they not?"

"It depends. If I fought I should be imprisoned, a shopman might be sent into penal servitude, and a working-man would be hanged; but if any of our betters—say Lord Mayrose and Lord Hornette—drew each other's blood there would be a mock trial before the House of Lords, and an acquittal; for we live in a just land, where laws are equal."

"Then you have heard of the coming duel?" exclaimed Violet, looking archly at the editor as though somewhat scandalised that one in his position should presume to know what went on in the highest circles. Violet wore her blonde hair fluffed over her forehead poodlewise, as the fashion demanded; and made an admirably doggy little marchioness, full of dignity and bark.

"I only know this because I have the honour of speaking to your ladyship," answered the editor with a demure laugh. "With ordinary people I should plead ignorance, I assure you."

"Mind you continue to be ignorant then," tittered Violet; and as Lord Uphill then accosted her, she disengaged herself from Mr. Dexter, and sailed away with her noble host.

Lord Heigho and Zellie had been standing within earshot all the while, but his lordship had not heard because he had been bemoaning to Zellie the poor prospects of grouse-shooting. Noticing that his partner returned no answers to his very luminous prying on this topic he glanced at her and perceived that she had become suddenly pale and that her arm trembled.

For a moment, indeed, after Violet was gone, Zellie stood as if rooted to the spot, then abruptly drew Lord Heigho towards Mr. Dexter. "How do you do, Mr. Dexter?" she said, in a quavering voice. "I see you do not dance."

"Pardon me, and if your ladyship will do me the favour——"

"With pleasure; there is a quadrille beginning now," and to the disgust of Lord Heigho, amazed by the impudence of this newspaper man, she took the Editor's arm just as Messrs. Toote and Dinye's band were crashing out the prelude to the last operetta selection.

It must be owned that a gust of glory flew up to Mr. Dexter's head like champagne. It was one of his theories—and a true one—that a man can win a Royal Princess just as easily as a beggar maid if he sets the right way to work; and the recollection that Lady Azalea Carol was unengaged, consequently wooable and hence winnable, had shaped itself in his alert mind even before he had singled out a *vis-à-vis*. She was adorably pretty—more so than her sister, though of graver beauty—rich, too, intellectual, no tea-cake-and-rosewater ladyship; and "Lady Azalea Dexter" was a style that would have looked wondrous well in those reports of high life festivities which are inserted in the *Morning Post*. But Mr. Dexter was not long in learning that Lady Azalea had not invited him to dance with her from any personal pining after his companionship.

"I overheard you say there was to be a duel between Lord Mayrose and Lord Hornette?" said she, frankly, as they took up their position, and her large hazel eyes glanced straight into his.

"Yes," bowed Mr. Dexter, and he was man enough not to feel as if cold water had been dashed on his dream; for few things promote wooing better than a secret which a lady wants to hear, and which a gentleman is able to tell. The editor easily guessed how matters stood, but he wisely determined to let Lady Azalea interrogate him, so that there might be the value of a service rendered in his revelations.

"And when is this duel going to take place?" continued Zellie with agitation, and waving her fan.

"I believe Lord Mayrose is going to resign immediately after the session, and the two enemies will go to the Continent."

"And everybody knows of this—yet can no one prevent it?" cried Zellie, in a voice at once querulous and doubting.

"Oh, very few people know of it, and those who do are persuaded that the duel will never come off," answered Mr. Dexter, composedly. "I confess, though, to thinking that it will come off."

"And have you any idea as to the cause of the duel?"

This time it was Mr. Dexter's turn to look into Zellie's eyes.

"The ostensible cause is some money quarrel, but two men of that rank do not fight about money. There must be some lady at the bottom of it."

Zellie blushed red, her breast heaved tumultuously, and she looked as if she were on the point of fainting.

"I think I will not dance this quadrille," she murmured, taking his arm. "I feel unwell—excuse my questions, but you know Lord Mayrose is an old friend of ours."

"I am aware of it," answered Mr. Dexter with feeling, as he led her out of the set. Then lowering his voice: "If your ladyship would like to hear the whole truth about this unhappy affair, and try to stop the duel, why do you not speak to Lord Mayrose himself? He rides in Rotten Row every morning at seven o'clock, when there is scarcely anyone there."

This was a bold stroke, but Mr. Dexter divined that Zellie would feel eternally grateful to him. She cast him a quick look of thankfulness as he led her back to her seat; and then with a low bow he withdrew.

A couple of hours afterwards, when Zellie had returned home, she said to her maid, "Stitchett, send some one to the stables, please, to say I shall ride at seven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Will Lady Chevy Chase ride, too?" asked Miss Stitchett, rather surprised.

"No," answered Zellie, "I shall ride alone with the groom."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"HOW MUCH THE WRETCHED DARE."

Hyde Park at early morning. The red jackets of long troops of Life Guardsmen exercising their black chargers glance through the trees; grooms are breaking-in ladies' hacks in the Row; riding masters and mistresses canter along with troops of very young pupils not afraid of getting out of bed at six; and up and down the road from Apsley House to the Marble Arch a score of purple or yellow breaks, driven by knowing whips, spank along at the sharp trot of tyro phaeton horses or of restive teams being trained for four-in-hand. On the doorsteps of all the houses overlooking the Park rosy housemaids are on their knees making the slabs snowy with bath-brick, or standing up and polishing brass bell-knobs; and inside the Park grey water-carts crawl along laying the dust; while gardeners, stooping over the beds of geranium and mignonette, are trimming shoots or plying hose. Here and there gangs of masons or road-menders trudge along to their work in their white flannel jackets and with their tin tea-bottles and dinner-bundles slung over their shoulders; and flocks of boys, with hair rumpled and wet, towels in hand and damp dogs gambolling in front of them, return from the Serpentine, where they have been bathing—in accordance with the immunities of this free land—unscreened, drawerless, and wild. These early risers are crossed by casual broughams bearing homewards from late cotillions yawning youths in evening clothes, or sleepy bebies of belles; and meantime the much-maligned London sun, as yet unblinded by coal-smoke, shines in a clear blue sky, and sheds a saffron light over the scene. The leafy trees, the short grass, the flowers and gravel-walks look cool and dewy; and in the distance, away beyond Constitution Hill, the Crystal Palace can be seen towering over a forest of houses like an enchanted castle of ruby, every one of its cornices tipped with golden flame.

Such is Hyde Park in ordinary mornings; but as Zellie rode through Grosvenor Gate the park was almost empty, for the air was sultry, and the sky overhead glowered with menaces of a storm. Half the night through sheet lightning had glittered over the city, and now great masses of inky clouds rolled over the heavens, and the rumble of approaching thunder was audible. Zellie passed the gate at a canter, followed by one of those upright young grooms with cheeks like peaches, and she made straight for the Row; when she reached it, however, and descried nothing but a solitary horseman or two floating like shadows in an avenue, her heart drooped lest Mayrose should not be there.

But he was there. He had taken to riding early in the morning because he was too busy to do so at other periods of the day, and because regular exercise at some time or other was a necessity to one so fagged. The comparative solitude of the hour also chimed in with his latterly melancholy mood; and yet though solitary and groomless he was not unknown, for he had become a familiar figure to most of the park-keepers and policemen, who touched their head-dresses to him, and to many riders, who turned round to stare at him as he ambled by, and wondered doubtless that a man whose future was so brilliant, and who wastalked of as a future Prime Minister, should look so grave and stern. One day, too, a grey man had rushed into the road and thrust a petition into Mayrose's hands. He was an old officer who had grown grizzled in colonial service, and whom Mr. Keane-Rodent and other clerks of his connection were trying to frustrate of his pension. Remembering Mr. Marvell's case, Mayrose had promptly and peremptorily seen justice done him; and ever since that day the old officer, buttoned up to the throat, walked along the railings every morning to lift his hat to the Minister. Mayrose smiled to him, inwardly warmed by the homage of his humble friend, and perhaps the old officer was the only man who did not think that Lord Mayrose was over proud and supercilious.

On rode Zellie, her horse's hoofs tossing up clouds of the dry sand around. Her dark blue habit fitted her without a plait. She sat erect, weighing nothing on the reins with her white doeskin gloves, and making no use of the little gold-headed riding whip in her hand; but her eyes scanned the prospect in front as the trees

dropped one after another behind her; and at length, when she was on a level with that fine specimen of wedding-cake architecture, the Albert Hall, she perceived Mayrose. He was riding alone, with his face turned upwards glancing at the sky, and he had just quickened his pace, for a few chilling drops of rain had begun to fall and the rumble of the thunder was deepening into a growl.

Zellie spurred in his direction, wheeled her horse abruptly round on a line with his, and held out her hand, which trembled.

"Freddy, I have come out on purpose to meet you. They tell me you have quarrelled with Lord Hornette, and are going to fight him. This must not be—such a man is not worth your anger?"

All this was said at a panting breath, and before Mayrose could realize who was speaking. Turning pale, he lifted his hat; then took the hand extended to him. As he did so his fingers trembled more than Zellie's. It had come, then, at length, this rencontre which he had longed for, yet dreaded! Often he had thought of putting himself in the way of meeting Zellie, but had been deterred by his duty to Mary, and now, seeing her near him and alone for the first time since his marriage, all his being thrilled. He held her hand a second longer than he suspected, but he did not seek to evade her question, for her eyes had plunged into his with a scrutiny too searching for equivocation.

"Yes, Zellie, I have quarrelled with Hornette," he said, rapidly; "he has slandered me, and I have warned him that unless he apologises I shall expect of him the only satisfaction one can obtain in such cases."

"His slanders are not the only reasons of your quarrel," exclaimed Zellie, in excitement; "there is another cause, and I know it."

"You know it?"

"Yes; and he shall not harm a hair of your head. You shall not hurt him either; for you would bring trouble upon yourself, and your life shall not be ruined through me."

The rain had begun to quicken—it was falling in large, fast drops; and just at that moment a steel-blue streak of forked lightning slit through the dark clouds, and produced a metallic clap of thunder that seemed to rend the whole heavens. It was instantly followed by a drenching cataract of water, and Zellie's horse shied, reared, and laid its ears back. "Let us get under shelter," cried Mayrose, grasping at Zellie's bridle.

"No! What does the lightning matter to me?" exclaimed Zellie, with sudden wildness; and giving her horse a cut with the whip, she let him have his head. The affrighted beast sprang forward, and Zellie threw her head back as if the torrents of rain and the electricity in the atmosphere were intoxicating her. "I wish the lightning would strike me dead," she panted.

"This is madness!" ejaculated Mayrose, starting into a gallop to get by her side. At the same time Zellie's groom, thinking his mistress's mount had bolted, came pounding along the other way. But Mayrose, perceiving Zellie's hack to be a mild-tempered animal and less fleet than his own, felt that he could control it himself, and so shouted to the groom to ride on to the lodge at the end of the Row, and see if shelter was to be obtained there. Zellie appeared to be beside herself. Her whole frame was quivering, tears streamed from her eyes, and her lips murmured words of fevered adjuration that were lost amid the raging of the storm. Mayrose, fearing she would faint or purposely let herself fall, rode in such wise that he could have caught her; and in their headlong course over the sand, which had now become a slough, they passed a population of startled people who seemed to have sprung up from underground, and who, as they imprudently huddled together under the trees, watched the reckless race with terror. A second flash of lightning, with a peal of thunder more appalling than the first, caused both horses to break into a sweat of fear and to redouble their gallop, and in that brief instant Mayrose's thoughts did mingle suicidally with Zellie's, and it seemed to him that if a thunderbolt would put an end to his troubles here, and link him and Zellie in death, he could wish for no better fate. But they arrived at the lodge without accident. The groom, steaming wet, was already waiting for them; and Mayrose, tumbling off his horse rather than dismounting, caught Zellie in his arms.

and carried her into the lodge. She allowed herself to be borne like a child. Her eyes were closed, her hat, which had fallen from her head, was trailing on her shoulders by its elastic, and her face was white as marble.

The lodge-keeper and his wife were ready to minister with kind offices, and the woman suggested tea. Without waiting to hear whether her offer was accepted she hastened out, and her husband with her, muttering something about a kettle, and Mayrose and Zellie were left alone.

A spasm then shot over Zellie's body, and she abruptly sprang up, as if all her faintness had been dispelled.

"We have but a minute or two more together," she gasped. "If you have ever had any regard for me, swear to me that this duel shall never take place." Then suddenly, as though her thoughts had started on a new tack, she faltered, "This reminds me of that day with the Kingschase hounds. Do you remember that day?"

"Yes; it is the one day of my life I shall never forget," ejaculated Mayrose, with an outburst of fervour and anguish. But hear me, Zellie—what you ask is impossible. I cannot recede from my quarrel with that man, for he would brand me with cowardice. Besides, my life is not so precious to me that I care to defend it. Only, should I survive, grant me this prayer which I make to you with heart-broken earnestness—promise me that you will marry, and never repeat those wishes for your own death which I have heard you utter to-day!"

"I shall never marry. Oh, why do you ask me such things!" she murmured, in reproach.

"I ask you them for both our sakes," exclaimed Mayrose, taking her hands and pressing them with despairing force. "I ask you these things because so long as you are not the wife of another man I shall know no peace. Our presence here together is a sin. I have a wife to whom I am bound so long as I live, and if I met you again I would not answer for myself. I repeat my prayer, Zellie, because I have a belief in a life beyond this, where every pang such as now tortures me is counted to us, and where you and I must meet again never to part. In this world let us not see or speak to each other more. Help me in this resolve. And now God bless you, and good-bye!"

"No; before we part you must hear me!" she cried, clinging to him and throwing her arms around him with all her distracted strength:—"I love you, darling, as never a woman loved before! I will be your widow watching over your fame and treasuring the memory of the days we have spent together as if the grave had closed over them; and if ever I can sacrifice my life to spare you a pang, my darling, if ever—ever—Oh, in pity!"

Her face was transfigured; her lips sought his, and they met in an embrace that never seemed to end. Then her clasp relaxed, her head drooped with a sigh, and he sustained her senseless in his arms.

"Fortunately at this juncture the lodge-keeper's wife bustled in, and Mayrose, drawing Zellie to a seat, pointed to her with a mute gesture, flung his purse into the woman's hands, and fled from the lodge like one possessed. The storm was now at the height of its fury; lightning and thunder burst in repeated flashes and bangs through the heavens like a combat of artillery, and the rain lashed the earth in torrents that seemed to rebound a foot high. The groom and the three horses were under one of the arches leading into Piccadilly, but Mayrose rushed through the rain, and unheeding the stupefaction of an apple-woman, a policeman, and some other British subjects congregated under the arch, climbed his horse, and frantically galloped homewards. The groom was too well-bred to offer any remonstrance, but watching the peer's vanishing and soaked figure, he remarked with philosophy: "That 'all make a sewte of clothes for my lud's gentleman."

Towards noon on this same day Lord Chevychase was in the morning-room, which he called his study—presumably because he studied the brands of cigars there—and he was curiously examining a newly invented revolver. Finding life dreary on the whole, his Lordship had converted one of the upper chambers of his mansion into a pistol gallery, the walls and doors being so padded that the firing made no noise, and there he would wile away an hour every day in shooting at

packs of cards. He was just thinking of going to experiment his new revolver there, and was in the act of loading it for the purpose, when there was a knock at the door, and Zellie walked in.

Lord Chevychase had not seen his sister-in-law that morning, though he had heard of her early ride in the storm—but without being told of the incident of that ride, for Zellie knew the golden means by which servants can be kept discreet. He started at seeing her so pale, and dressed in black silk as if she was in mourning, and exclaimed—

"Widing in the wain doesn't much agree with you, Zellie; you look hipped!"

"Oh, the ride did me no harm," said Zellie gently. "I am afraid John was more inconvenienced than I. Are you busy?"

"I was loading this new wewolver. You see it has a hollow stock containing cartridges, so that when those in the chambers are exploded six more come up from the stock by means of a wheel, and enable you to fire twelve shots in a quarter of a minute. I was going up stairs to try it, but if I can be of service to you——"

"I am afraid I shall be disturbing you."

"I am always at your orders, Zellie, and glad to be disturbed."

"You are very good-natured. I had come to ask whether you would mind inviting Lord Hornette to luncheon or dinner to-day?"

Lord Chevychase gave a start as if this were much too welcome a request to be credible. "Invite Hornette? Why—why—of course, Zell, if you wish it."

"I wish to see him," said Zellie, who was blushing.

"And may I tell him that the invitation comes from you?"

"If you think that would be more likely to make him come."

Lord Chevychase locked his revolver-box; but he was in such amazement that he did not draw out the key. "If I go off at once I may just find him at the Brummel," he said, and straightway darted out, leaving Zellie in the study. Two steps at a time his lordship clambered upstairs to his dressing-room to throw off his velvet jacket and put on a frock-coat; but before coming down again he hastened to his wife's boudoir to apprise her of the good tidings. Violet clapped her hands. "Ah, she has come to her senses at last! She has found out how wretched it is to remain unmarried when one can be mistress of Hivesworth. How pleased poor Hornette will be; but I hope he will kill Mayrose all the same—such a wretch doesn't deserve to live! Go off at once, Bertie dear; don't lose a minute!" And Bertie dear decamped with such speed that he forgot to take any gloves, an omission which added much to his commotion of mind when he found himself in the open air.

Violet then made a quick move to go and join her sister, fondle her, and if need were, have a good cry with her; but her tact suggested the reflection that Zellie had better be left alone in such a moment. If she were on the point of being reconciled to Lord Hornette, premature congratulation might arouse some of that wayward spirit peculiar to women, and make her start into a new freak of obstinacy. Violet knew all about such freaks; and so, to stave off the impatience and excitement of the next hour, rang for her Maltese dog, and laid herself out to untangle his curls with an ivory comb, eking out this process of beautifying by little interjections:—"Poo' doggy—did he object to be combed, then? And wouldn't he have a blue ribbon round his neck to be prettier than the other dogs? Just like a powder-puff he was, white and silky all over!"

In such wise sixty minutes passed; then a quarter of an hour. The powder-puff dog lay on the hearthrug, combed but ill-pleased; Violet had run twenty times to the window, looked at herself in the glass, passed her finger through the frizzly hair over her forehead, read the *Morning Post* and *Reporter*, and rung three times to give conflicting orders about lunch; but at length a hansom clattered up to the door, and Lords Chevychase and Hornette alighted.

The latter was outwardly composed but inwardly much moved. As future Duke of Bumblebeigh it had been excruciating humiliation to him to be jilted, and in a first angry moment he had refused to come with Chevychase, doubting whether he should be consulting the dignity of the house of Drone in agreeing to a reconciliation. But it had required little pressing to make him waver, for the truth was,

he loved Zellie so well that he would have walked on all-fours from the Brummel to Grosvenor Square, wearing his father's coronet and followed by the whole House of Lords and by the Queen's most Honourable Privy Council, if by so doing he could have made sure of obtaining Zellie's hand and affection. To compound with his conscience, however, and with the dignity of the house of Drone, Lord Hornette planned to treat Zellie's vagaries as the venial whims of a spoiled child, and coming along in the hansom he had conned over a little speech with a joke in it which he thought would smooth matters at commencing.

Violet ran down to meet the gentlemen in the dining-room, and a whispered consultation was held there. "My sister is still in the study; you had better go straight in, Lord Hornette."

"Yes; go in, take her hand, and make it up," concurred the Marquis, accompanying Hornette to the door. Then sinking his voice so that his wife could not hear: "and if it all comes straight, old fellow, shake hands with Mayrose afterwards. My mother-in-law asked me to intercede with you and tell you my mind. The bickerings of this season have been like needles and pins to me."

Lord Hornette said nothing, but knocked at the study door. There was no answer, so he turned the handle, and saw Zellie with her face averted and drying her eyes. It was a full instant before she turned and confronted him, and then he discerned but too plainly that there was nothing like reconciliation in her features. She looked funereal in her black dress, so that Lord Hornette's jocular speech froze on his lips, and he grew pale with indignation at the thought that she might be going to trifle with him again.

"Lord Hornette, excuse me for having troubled you to come," she began, beseechingly, "but I have heard that you are going to fight with Lord Mayrose about me. Let me tell you that such a duel would be murder."

"Is that all you wished to say to me, Lady Azalea?" asked Lord Hornette, sternly, and he bitterly regretted having come.

"I wish to say that you have no right whatever to fight about me, and that you have no cause for quarrel with Lord Mayrose, who has never said or done anything to injure you."

"My cause for quarrelling with him is that he has robbed me of your affections—that is enough, Lady Azalea."

"My love was never yours, so he could not rob you of it."

"But you had plighted your troth to me—you let me live for a year in the belief that you would be my wife—and during that time I fed my thoughts day and night with the image of your beauty and grace, and with dreams for your happiness! Then you flung me away without a word of pity, and it was for love of him! Why disguise it? I know it." He broke off and made a step towards her. "But hear me, Lady Zell; I will shake hands with Mayrose and forget all the past on one condition, and that is that you renew our engagement. I know that you will not love me at first, but I will wait patiently, and trust that my infinite devotion and respect will end by softening you. There is not another woman in England whom I would woo in this way; but I am like a child in your hands. I can bear hard treatment from you if you leave me hope."

"I will never be your wife!" cried Zellie, impetuously and with scornful anger. "When I gave you my promise I was unaware that you had misled a man who had loved me and whom I loved—yes, I am not ashamed to confess it—with an unmanly falsehood."

"Mayrose never told me that he loved you," protested the Earl, vigorously. "I sounded him, and he said he regarded you as a sister. But, if I did use stratagem you ought to be the last person to reproach me, for it was only done out of my blind passion for you."

"Oh, I am not your match at casuistry, my lord," retorted Zellie, in an accent of hatred and disdain. "But now I ask you again, will you forego this duel or not?"

"No," exclaimed the Earl determinedly, as a flush of exasperation mounted to his brow. "It was he who proposed the duel, not I. We shall meet man to man, and so much the worse for him if he falls."

"Ah, this is too much!" exclaimed Zellie, transported. "You talk as if the match between you would be an equal one! But who are you beside Lord Mayrose? He has a wife whom his death would kill—he is a statesman with a noble future before him—one of whom the whole kingdom will be proud if he can live to fulfil his career. And who are you, I repeat?"

"A man who loves you," replied the Earl, simply.

"You are no one!" cried Zellie, with the taunting cruelty that is like a barb on the tongues of women when infuriated. "If it were not for the name and fortune which are yours by accident, your talents and character would class you among the lowest of mankind! No one has ever heard of you ennobling yourself by great or good acts. Nobody has ever mentioned your name with respect, gratitude, or love! If you died to-day, your place would be filled at the instant, and you would not be missed or mourned. Before you try to take Lord Mayrose's life, Lord Hornette, make yourself his equal, that your own life may be a fair stake against his, or else you will be a coward and a villain!"

"All this is very painful and unnecessary," said Lord Hornette, in a shocked tone. "If I had not hated Mayrose before, I should do so now, from seeing how he has perverted a nature so gentle and pure as yours."

As he said this he made for the door; she rushed to bar his way, and in so doing her eyes fell upon Lord Chevychase's revolver case, which still lay on the table. It is opportunities of this sort which beget desperate crimes. Zellie Carol was scarcely conscious of her actions; she was sobbing and distraught. With an instantaneous impulse she darted to the table; the case flew open; she seized the revolver, and pointed it at the Earl.

"Lord Hornette, look to yourself! You prevented me from being Lord Mayrose's wife, but I have sworn to remain his sister, and to watch over him—to sacrifice my life for him if I had the chance. God has thrown this weapon in my way! Swear to me that you will abandon your enmity against the man you have misjudged, foully slandered, and persecuted, or I shoot you dead and then kill myself! The loss of both of us will not be felt; it will avert greater evils, and Heaven shall decide the extent of my guilt."

Horrified at the turn matters had taken, Lord Hornette stood as if in a trance. But he was brave to the core, and did not stir an inch or exclaim. "You are forgetting yourself, Lady Azalea;" he said, quietly, "Please put down the firearm; it is a dangerous weapon for a lady to play with."

"Then God have mercy on you!" cried Zellie, convulsively, and she pulled the trigger.

An astounding report, a crash and shiver of broken glass, and a cloud of smoke; but Zellie's hand had trembled, and Lord Hornette stood unscathed. Through the smoke he saw Zellie turn the revolver towards herself, but in one bound he had sprung to her side, and wrenched it by main force from her hand. At the same instant Violet and Lord Chevychase burst in.

"What has happened?" inquired the Marquis, aghast.

"Oh! it's nothing," answered Lord Hornette, with a laugh. "I had taken up your revolver, not knowing it was loaded, and it went off in my hands. You shouldn't keep such things on your table, Chevychase, for I am afraid I have frightened Lady Zell."

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

"VOX POPULI VOX DEI."

You may be sure it was a fine morning when the first general election by the Universal Suffrage of males and females was held in London.

The month was December. The day had dawned with a woolly fog, but this cleared away towards ten, and then flocks of women began to be seen trudging through the mist to exercise their rights. London was to return seventy members, that is, one for every 50,000 inhabitants. There were new constituencies, named Pimlico, Mayfair, Tyburn, Kensington, Covent Garden, St. John's Wood, White-chapel, and heaven knows what else. Each of them was to return one representative, and they were assessed with an average of four candidates apiece.

Never, indeed, had such a herd of candidates been witnessed. Britain had broken out into a malignant eruption of them. All adventurers who were not successful in honest work, briefless barristers, third-rate journalists, half-educated cobblers, tired of heeling and soleing, conceited prigs, who had been on a tour to America or the Antipodes, and thought themselves qualified to brag of their experience on the strength of these travels; mad sophists, snubbed inventors, cashiered officers, disbarred advocates, the whole dowdy phalanx of men "with a grievance"—all these self-asserting persons had rushed howling into the electoral field.

During the four months that had elapsed between the close of the session and the election, the kingdom had been filled with a huge blatant din. The two great parties in the State had tried to organize their forces, but the spirit of independence was too rife for the decrees of caucuses to be obeyed. As every candidate thought he had a chance under this new system, no man would retire in favour of a rival; and all that could be prognosticated by Colonel Dandelion and Mr. Bellwether, the "whip" on the other side, was that the time for moderation in opinions had passed. The candidates who seemed to be making the best way in their canvass were those who professed the wildest autocratic Conservatism or Radicalism fraught with virulence and Iconoclasm verging on lunacy.

And now the day of election had at last arrived. We are believed to be an undemonstrative people by those who judge us when we are not excited; but on this occasion there was a current of electricity in the air, making men's and women's tongues wag and their brows flush. To use the jargon of the newspapers, the England of the past had vanished, and the aurora of a new England was rising, peaceful, splendid and democratic. So cabmen splendidly shouted and flourished their whips as they hied through the streets with flaming posters on their vehicles, inscribed with such catches as "Free Land!" "Free Church!" "Free Dinner-table!" "Everything Free!" The gin-shops drove a roaring trade in fiery drinks and boozy principles. Candidates were entrenched in houses everywhere about, and bawled out of the windows. And wherever a voting-place was established, gestic, grinning, horse-playing throngs were congregated to see the women coming up to vote.

They came up in vast numbers, and they were just the sort of women who, it had long been predicated, would be the only ones to use their rights. The high-born ladies who had toyed with the question of suffrage as an amusing innovation; the decent women of the educated classes, wives, widows, or sisters, had judged it prudent to stay at home at the last moment; but females of the Miss Minerva type—childless, loveless, graceless, ill-favoured champions of contagious maladies, dissecting-room studies, and all uncleanness—abounded; and so did Poll, Sally, and Meg, staggering up shrieking, down at heel and drunken from the slums, to give their voice as to how a great Empire should be governed. Here and there it refreshed one to see in the tide of degraded womanhood some valorous mother squar-

ing her elbows and going to vote for a candidate who avowed a belief in God and devotion to the principles which had made of England in old time the leading nation of the world ; but they were the exception, for what did the Misses Minerva know of God, and what did Poll, Sally, and Meg, care for the history of England ? To the former of these female hordes God was an exploded superstition, man an improved newt, and the soul a bundle of nerves ; and to the latter England was a place chokeful of lords who fared sumptuously, while poor Jack and Jerry often swore for want of a good meal. In the poorer quarters all the greed and savage class-hatred of pauperdom had been undyked, and ignorance and misery combined had raised their maniacal hopes that all social inequalities were about to be removed now that the famished were going to rule the roast. But it was curious to observe another kind of social defiance that was being flaunted in such districts as Pimlico, where the feminine electorate was largely made up of casino frequenters, flashy, tawdry, and all "gay," to borrow their own charming expression. These enfranchised females had their ideas for regenerating society, too ; but, to do them justice, they evinced more modesty than the Minervas, who most of them had only been saved from a career of gaiety by the drawback of not being good-looking.

Now Mr. Quintus Dexter was the candidate for Pimlico. He had allowed himself to be nominated in Hiveshire, but wisely desired to have two strings to his bow, and he had spent the recess in canvassing the petticoated electors of his constituency not unmerrily. At the hour when voting was at its height he sallied forth on horseback to survey the progress of matters. He was admirably dressed, had a flower in his coat, lavender gloves, and a liveried groom behind him ; for he had too much sense to play the American trick of appearing shabby to please the Unwashed. The Unwashed love to see a candidate well clothed, though they covet his fine attire, and Mr. Dexter was frequently cheered on his way. He answered by good-humoured nods and touches of his hat-brim, and he only departed from his aristocratic quietness on reaching a ballot-booth. Here he reined in, and called out with deliciously dry impertinence to a mob of working men, who, as usual, were doing nothing—

"Will one of you gentlemen kindly hold my groom's horse while that independent elector goes to discharge his rights of citizenship." And saying this he flung half-a-dozen sovereigns among the working gentlemen who hustled forward.

"Hurrah for bribery !" hiccoughed these Britons, as they scrambled for the coins.

"Yes, it's bribery, but in the interest of the other side," replied Mr. Dexter, with a smile. "I expect you to vote for Odge the shoemaker."

The groom alighted amid the scrimmage, and ran in, grinning, to vote for or against his master ; and while Mr. Dexter was being gaped at, and was standing a fire of small chaff from such of the free and independents as had not succeeded in picking up money, a well-appointed brougham dashed up and released Miss Margaret Top—better known as Pegtop—and Miss Kitty Frizzles, both of the Bijou Theatre. This pair had come to vote in demure black silk dresses, and with some fear of having cabbage stalks flung at them ; but the mob were much impressed by their comeliness and splendour, and waxed admiring. Seeing which Miss Pegtop gathered heart, and sang out—

"Quintus, we are going to vote against you !"

"I don't believe it."

"You'll see. What will you give for our two votes ?"

"Come near me, and I'll show you."

"I dare say. 'Hands off' is my motto, and Odge is the man for my money !"

"Don't say that," laughed Mr. Dexter. "People will think you owe him a boot bill, and you've too much taste to be shod by such a fellow. He's only good enough to make a member of Parliament of."

The working gentlemen guffawed, the actresses rustled in to vote, and whether they gave their suffrages to the editor of the *Reporter* is uncertain. At all events, Mr. Dexter was elected that day both in Pimlico and Hiveshire. He had greatly advanced his candidanship by spreading thousands of gratis copies of his newspaper in his two constituencies ; but it was characteristic of the respect in which

he held the new electorate that he had drawn up for his town electors an address differing in many essentials from that which he submitted to the bumpkins. On being invited one evening at a public meeting in Pimlico to reconcile these discrepancies, he had retorted courteously that he never answered unpleasant questions after dinner.

But meanwhile the results of elections held in the provinces on the previous days were being published in special editions of the morning journals, and they showed a truly lamentable rout of the government families. Never would anyone have suspected that there could have been such a holocaust of Drones, Midges, Rodents, and Keane-Foresters. Among political theorists it had long been held that the Liberalism of England was not as that of some other heaven-forsaken countries—France, Spain, Rio-Brigande, and the like—that it was a thoughtful Liberalism, contained within bounds, and tending nowise to revolutionaryism. These wise students of human nature forgot that if the Liberalism of England had hitherto been kept within bounds, it was owing to her institutions, which were like mighty breakwaters, and that once these breakwaters were removed, the apes of the ignorant and unscrupulous would break loose here as in other lands. The peasant masses having no prefects to weigh upon them, and being shielded by the ballot, had become easy dupes to agrarian agitators, just as the workmen in cities had let themselves be hoaxed by stump Republicans. On the other hand, in Ireland reactionary Roman Catholics were the chief victors, thanks to the women; and both in Scotland and Wales, Liberal up to that time, the old deference to lairdship had asserted itself among the illiterate, rough-tongued peasantry, and had produced an astonishing crop of Conservatives. England had for this once returned the shaggiest lot of members, and seemed in truth to have fairly kicked over the traces. Lord Hornette, Dolly Drone, and Balbie Drone—all the Drones, in fact—had succumbed to patriots with such names as Hodge, Codge, and Dodge; and their only consolation was that a similar fate had overtaken the great House of Dolittle, which exercised the same influence as that of Drone on the opposite side of Parliament. The Duke of Dunderweal's progeny had been smitten to the cry which had been chorused from one end of the kingdom to the other: "WE DON'T WANT NO MORE WHIGS ON OUR HEADS!"

Mr. Paramount, however, had been returned, and so had his rival, Mr. Paradyse; and the Premier was known to be in town while the metropolitan elections were being held. All through the day he sat in Downing-street receiving telegrams; and as tidings of one defeat after another reached him, his impassive countenance deadened into a hue of anxiety. His reign was going to end, for his majority was already gone, and the London elections would naturally diminish his strength still further. For the mere loss of office he did not care; what harassed him in the soul was the prospect of having to face the bitter reproaches of lords, the frowns of ladies; to hear it universally bewailed that he had failed in perspicacity. Inwardly he knew that he had not failed in perspicacity. He had expected defeat—not quite such a defeat as this though—for he guessed that the first exercise of universal suffrage would be a wayward one; but he had calculated that at the second general election the Conservative beliefs of the lower orders would at length manifest themselves to his vindication. The difficulty before him now was to tide over the period of exclusion from office, to rally the remnants of his disheartened party, and to train them for a future grand onslaught, which he confided would bring him back to power, not for a trumpery year or two, but for the remainder of his days.

Mr. Paramount's moral courage exceeded that of any other English politician. His mind was of the elastic kind which rebounds under the shock of adversity; so after the first hour of anguish he brushed away the moist drops from his brow, and prepared to meet his upbraiding followers with a sympathetic yet cheerful face.

The first to arrive were Lords Rosemary and Lobby. The former thought Great Britain had gone mad, and had been much disturbed over his muffin at breakfast from reflecting that he lived in such times; but he had felt better since, owing to some claret and a biscuit, and was hoping that things would come right in the end. Lord Lobby, though fairly scared too, was ready to make allowances for the general epidemic of lunacy; but one thing he could neither pardon or under-

stand was that his own brother, Mr. Backstayre, had been beaten by one of his farmers. "I couldn't have believed it possible!" he protested, sinking bewildered into a chair.

But soon little Sir Tito Tumb staggered in, limp as an unstarched handkerchief, and his case was truly the most pitiable of all: he had lost the seat which he had held for forty years!

"Oh, Paramount!" he exclaimed, in a tone of reproach at once pathetic, heart-broken, and heart-breaking. "England is going to the dogs!"

"I really feel for you deeply, Tumb," remarked the Premier, kindly. "I shall certainly advise the Queen to grant you a peerage."

Sir Tito was soothed, but not comforted. Who could tell how long the House of Peers, or even the Queen herself, would last at this rate?

"I thought you said we were going to reach the Conservative strata with this Bill?" he moaned, sitting down, and resting his fevered brow upon his hand.

"So we shall; but not at once," said Mr. Paramount, confidently. "The time has come when there is no room for any medium of opinion between Radicalism of the most rampant type and Conservatism. The people will not long stand being governed on principles which simply mean blasphemy and blunder, and next time we get in it will be for a long time; for all who have a penny to lose will be on our side."

"Heaven hear you!" piteously ejaculated Sir Tito, for he thought a good deal of heaven when he was miserable.

"Meanwhile Paradyse must come in," observed Lord Lobby, with dismal sarcasm; "I suppose his earnestness will adapt itself to the new state of things."

"Yes," answered Mr. Paramount, with a furtive smile; "and he will have a pleasant time of it."

More telegrams here came in, and among them that announcing the discomfiture of the Drones. Mr. Paramount remained quite unruffled, and Lord Rosemary played abstractedly with his watch-chain; but the other two statesmen lifted up their hands and exclaimed, as if now verily it were a case of Ichabod, and the glory of England had departed from her.

"The poor Duke will have an attack of gout," observed the Foreign Secretary, with the deepest concern.

"And Hornette will go mad," chimed in Sir Tito, half consoled by this time for his own mishaps by witnessing those of his friends. "I wish now the Lords had thrown out the Bill—they would have done so if it had not been for Mayrose's speeches."

"By the way, talking of Mayrose, all this won't improve his relations with the Drones, who are his country neighbours," interrupted Lord Lobby, arching his movable eyebrows. "What are the rights and wrongs of that duel story? I never heard for certain."

"There was a challenge, for I was present," replied little Sir Tito; "but some days before the end of the session Hornette sent a note withdrawing his insults. I never knew why."

"Nor I," said Lord Rosemary, pleasantly.

At this juncture a messenger entered with another trayful of telegrams. Mr. Paramount opened them calmly. "More defeats," he said with philosophy. "Sir Ham Pennywoddle has been beaten, and so has Sir Joel Jiddledubbin, who stood in Hiveshire under his patronage."

"Mayrose won't be sorry for that," cried Lord Lobby, arranging his hair dejectedly opposite a looking glass, "he and his father-in-law seemed like two cross-sticks."

"Aye, but I expect Pennywoddle will soon get a worse beating than this," put in Sir Tito in a mysterious tone. "Do you see how the quotations of his Loan have been falling?"

CHAPTER II.

QUOTATIONS AT 50.

The quotations of the Rio-Brigande Loan had sunk very low. Issued originally at 98, bearing an interest of 12 per cent., the shares had, thanks to the puffs of venal City editors, and to the efforts of a ring of which Robgroschen was the centre, gone up as high as 120. Robgroschen, Mr. Scrappe, the stock-broker, Mr. Tarry, the solicitor, had all made large sums by reselling at the fictitious premium shares which they had bought at the rate of issue; and Lady Canonlaugh had done a similar stroke of business. Her ladyship had been very active in promoting the Loan in Society, and many ladies crippled in fortune but influential had received shares to assist her.

For all this, however, the Loan was not a success. As above said, the premium was fictitious—which means that Pennywoddle and Jiddledubbin had by Robgroschen's advice pretended that the entire loan had been applied for by the public, whereas in fact but one million out of the four had been sold to *bona fide* investors. As explained in a former chapter, Sir Ham had refused to lend himself to the scheme by which the loan would have become an assuredly good affair for himself, but a gigantic swindle for the public. He had, acting under Grace Marvell's directions, bound himself to lend four millions on the guarantee of customs receipts and tobacco monopoly, and the consequence was that he was obliged himself to pay the value of the shares which were not bought by the public. Bills kept pouring in from Rio-Brigande, and he honoured them; but to do this he was obliged to raise money in all directions. He had parted with his interests in the Oyster-Shell Utilization Company, and in his Manufacture of Sausage Meat; he had sold his share in the *Reporter* to Mr. Dexter; and all this while he and Jiddledubbin had on hand three millions' worth of the Loan shares, part of which, at least, they might have sold had they accepted a lower price than 120. But Robgroschen and Scrappe earnestly warned them that if they flooded the market with their scrip they would bring about a depreciation which would in a few days cause the shares to sink much below the rate of issue. The only sound policy, said these knowing gentlemen, was for Pennywoddle and Jiddledubbin to hold back their shares until there was a genuine and wide demand for them.

It thus came to pass that the first quarter's interest on the Loan fell due in October, and to the immense surprise of Robgroschen and his compeers, Senor Fandango de los Doblones issued an announcement that the coupons would be paid. The reason of this was that on finding himself at the head of big sums of money, Senor Descamisado had really seen his way to governing his country. After remitting a couple of millions to Europe for his own private use in case of accidents, he had honestly applied the other two to corrupting the leading politicians and to organising his small army into a powerful body guard; then having by these means acquired greater might than any of his predecessors, he had launched anew on a course of shootings, confiscations, and proscriptions, which read uncommonly well in European telegrams when summarized thus:—"Order is being rapidly consolidated in Rio-Brigande." So when the October coupon was paid something like confidence in the destinies of the regenerate Republic began to sprout even in wary minds. Quotations of the Loan advanced to 125, and many of the *bona fide* holders of scrip sold out at a profit, and trumpeted the beauty of their investment afar. Robgroschen and Scrappe applied to Pennywoddle and Jiddledubbin for a hundred thousand pounds' worth of shares at par, and resold them at the full premium, and Sir Ham and his partner actually contrived to sell an additional fifty thousand pounds' worth through foreign brokers at the price of quotation. But again Robgroschen dissuaded the pair of knights from flooding the market, alleging that the time for parting with their shares had not yet arrived. Indeed, he pretended that the hundred thousand pounds' worth of shares which he and his friends had applied for had been resold for 105 only to persons who were in a position to push the loan.

"Do but wait," pleaded he, through his nose, "and after the next coupon is paid, you shall be able to get rid of the whole at 140 or 150."

Pennywoddle and Jiddledubbin had waited accordingly, but their heyday of hopefulness did not last long. Whether, if it had been left to itself, Rio-Brigande would have realized the sanguine prognostications made of it, there is no saying; but one day of woe what should a respected London journal do but publish from a Rio-Brigandian correspondent a three column letter, in which the politics and financial prospects of that country were analysed with the pitiless minuteness for which the correspondences of that particular organ were famous. This letter and two others which succeeded it by the next mail came like knock-down blows upon Rio-Brigandian securities. In vain did Senor Fandango write to the papers that his country had been maligned; in vain did he threaten a prosecution for slander and conspiracy—the sores of his country had been exposed with too ruthless a hand, and shareholders rushed panic-stricken into the market to sell out. At the same time, Pennywoddle and Jiddledubbin, hoping they might realize something before the quotations sank below par, imprudently stopped their ears to the advice of Robgroschen, and filled the hands of brokers right and left with their own shares. Then Rio-Brigandian scrip became unsalable. The report of a new insurrection—quelled by Senor Descamisado, but disquieting for all that—arrived inopportunistically to complete the panic, and at the moment of the general election, when Sir Tito Tumb had spoken in such gloomy terms of Sir Ham's predicament, Rio-Brigandian quotations had declined to 50.

It was on the evening of the election day that Sir Ham, Grace Marvell, and Lady Canonlaugh were assembled in the drawing-room at Penny. Lady Canonlaugh had been staying for the past six weeks in Sir Ham's house, because the knight, having been obliged to return to his estate for canvassing purposes, had not been able to endure separation from Grace. He was, in fact, not competent to take care of himself. All the Loan business above alluded to as having been performed by him had been transacted in his name by Grace Marvell, Prince Casino, and his friend Jiddledubbin; and the poor knight had approved everything like a child. His mind seemed a blank. He still dyed his hair, he trotted behind Grace like a lapdog, and he even woke to a semblance of life when she was present; but at other times he wandered about in a purposeless, vacant way, and in all contingencies expressed his sentiments by one of these two catch-phrases, "Good 'll come of it," "Ill 'll come of it." Penny and the lands around were no longer his, but Grace's; and he appeared wholly indifferent to the thought that he was dependent on her for hospitality, and that his money affairs were in wretched embarrassment. Even the loss of his seat had aroused no symptoms of regret in him, except when Grace had evinced her indignation at the event. Then he had looked cowed and rueful, as he always did when she was displeased.

Grace was reading aloud an early copy of the *Muffin Bell*, with the returns of the elections as far as known, and she shrugged her queenly shoulders as one queer name after another met her eyes.

"It is an incomprehensible thing to me that you should have been defeated, Sir Ham, while such men as Mr. Dexter are returned!" exclaimed she with irritation.

"Ill 'll come of it," said the knight, miserably, as he sat crouched in his arm-chair, as though dinner had disagreed with him. He kept his eyes intently fixed on Grace's face, and would sit for hours thus mutely admiring her.

"You must not remain long without a seat, however; one must be found for you somehow," resumed Grace, dropping the paper in disgust. "If Lord Mayrose did his duty he would insist on a peerage being granted to you."

"He might very readily do that before the Ministry go out," remarked Lady Canonlaugh, placidly, as she arranged the folds of her black lace shawl. Her ladyship had become a great ally of Grace's since the latter's good circumstances had become known to her. She was aware of Grace's intended marriage with Prince Casino, but the Prince had had the wit to make her believe that the match was purely one of interest on his part; and Lady Canonlaugh calculated that she

might make goodly pickings out of the future Princess Casino's fortune by socially patronizing her and keeping the Italian in her thralldom.

"Lord Mayrose might do many things, but he never will unless he is forced to do it," said Grace, with suppressed petulancy.

"Well, but he might be forced to it," answered Lady Canonlaugh, in a rather mysterious tone, as she screened the glow of the fire from her composed features; and saying this smiled meaningly.

"How so, dear Lady Canonlaugh?" asked Grace, glancing at her chaperon.

"I hear someone a gallopin'," observed the knight, suddenly sitting up.

The ladies listened. There was in truth a sound of hoofs in the park avenue, and in another minute a rider was heard reining in noisily on the gravel sweep. The front door bell clanged violently, a footman hurried up, and immediately afterwards Prince Casino was ushered in, flushed and muddy, and evidently in great commotion. "Excuse me, ladies, I hired myself a horse in Hiveborough to reach you quicker than in a fly," he began, panting, and looked around to see whether the footman was out of the room.

"Let Prince Casino's horse be taken to the stables," said Grace, and the servant retired.

"Ah, dio mio! What an occurrence!" the Prince then exclaimed; "see here these telegrams! Descamisado has had Strummings, that newspaper correspondent, arrested and shot; and Meester Skeddle, Sir Ham's agent for superintending the Customs' receipts, and tobacco monopoly, he has been shot too, and all his accounts and cash-boxes plundered. Descamisado telegraphs to me that it was all a mishap, done unintentionally in a street brawl, and he says that the next coupon will be paid if we prevail upon the English Government to accept an apology and a moderate compensation. But how do that?—all those satanized newspapers will be crying for vengeance to-morrow morning!"

Prince Casino laid two or three telegrams on the table, and the ladies rose in consternation to examine them. No notice was taken of Sir Ham, who left his seat, too, however, and stood by Grace's side eyeing the Italian's bespattered trousers with imbecile wonder.

"What is to be done?" asked Grace, pale, and biting her lips.

"Well, Fandango is going to all the newspaper offices to tell them this was a mistake—but the newspapers they will mock themselves of this explanation! Ah! if Rio-Brigande were a strong State! but it is weak, and that ridiculous British lion he will rage and flourish his tail. There will be a public noise for sending a fleet and requiring Descamisado to humiliate himself, which you see he can never do consistently with his honour."

"The murder of two English subjects is a grave affair, and Senor Descamisado must make reparation of some sort," remarked Lady Canonlaugh, in her chilly voice, which warned a trifle, though, for her interest in the Loan was still strong.

"Yes, and I think Senor Descamisado would have best evinced his honour by not committing these two murders, and by not stealing the cash-box of Sir Ham's agent!" ejaculated Grace, at once indignant and despairing. "How do we know that even if Descamisado is not punished for this we shall be the better for it? He has caused the accounts of the agent to be destroyed, and we have no security now for the interest; as to the murder of the journalist that is evidently a piece of spite."

"Ah, signorina, the exigencies of politics!" moaned the Prince. "Descamisado was a brigand to act thus, but what will you?—If the British fleet point their guns at him and humiliate him, his prestige will be gone, his subjects will rise in rebellion, and then the Loan will be repudiated—whereas if Descamisado is not humiliated I truly think everything will arrange itself, and Descamisado has promised to appoint me minister at St. James' as soon as St. James' recognizes him."

"Repudiation must be averted at any cost," remarked Lady Canonlaugh, who shrank from incurring the reproaches of numerous friends to whom she had recommended the Loan.

"Yes, but what are we to do?" repeated Grace, helplessly.

"I think I know a way," resumed Lady Canonlaugh, with a slight cough, and glancing in the direction of Sir Ham, to intimate that he was one too many.

Grace instantly addressed the old knight as if she were his elder sister and he a little boy. "We will play a game at billiards by-and-bye, Sir Ham; would you go into the billiard-room and prepare the balls?"

The old knight shuffled out obedient and stupidly smiling, and when the door had closed, Grace turned impatiently to her chaperon. "What way do you propose, dear Lady Canonlaugh?"

"I must begin by premising that the Loan would be in serious danger if Senor Descamisado were molested?" asked the Countess sedately.

"In every danger. Why, if there were difficulties, Descamisado would take the pretext of running away with all the money he could lay hands on. I know him," answered the Prince, mopping his brow; and Grace gave a little stamp of the foot as if precious time were being wasted in speculating as to Senor Descamisado's probable proceedings.

"Well, then, Grace, dear, you must call on Lord Mayrose the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Call on Lord Mayrose!" exclaimed Grace, starting, and flushing crimson.

"Yes, for this is the time to strike a grand blow," said Lady Canonlaugh, rapidly but coldly. "The Ministry will probably not resign for at least ten days more, and perhaps not till Parliament meets. In this interval many things can be done, and since his speech in the House of Lords Lord Mayrose has become by far the most influential member of the Cabinet, after Mr. Paramount, so that he can grant you whatever you desire. Now, this Rio-Brigande outrage is one upon which the Cabinet must take immediate action, and their action will be confirmed by their successors, as it always is in such cases. You must therefore point out to Lord Mayrose that the interests of English bondholders will be compromised if Senor Descamisado is treated too roughly; that Government ought to be satisfied with a moderate reparation, and put no slight upon Descamisado."

Grace shrugged her shoulders, and her face fell. All this seemed the wildest talk to her. "You little know Lord Mayrose, Lady Canonlaugh, if you think he could be coaxed into being obliging by any supplications of mine."

"I know he could not be coaxed, my dear child, but what if you were in a position to use threats?"

"Threats?" and a quick, singular light shot up into Grace's eyes. The fixity with which she bent her glance on the Countess had something of the cat's glare in it.

Lady Canonlaugh drew a small Russian-leather pocket-book, and from it extracted two letters. There was a light in her eyes too as she did this, for she was one of those women who are hurtful by nature, like nettles. "My dear Grace, I did not project sending you into battle unarmed. You can ask Lord Mayrose for what purpose he holds secret meetings with Lady Azalea Carol in a summer-house on the borders of Elmwood Park—not occasional meetings, for he has been seeing her three or four times a week for the past month at least. He will begin by denying, and then you can tell him of these two letters. One of them was written by Lady Azalea, and the other is Lord Mayrose's answer to it. I obtained them both from Lady Azalea's maid, who is their intermediary, and they cost me ten pounds each."

Grace had opened the letters and hurriedly read them; and all the emotions of gratified hatred were reflected on her face.

"You see, my dear Grace, they are valuable letters," continued the Countess, with a stinging little laugh. "It was accident that made me first aware of the meetings of the two lovers. I was driving by and saw them; after that I set a watch, and this is the result. If those letters were submitted to Lord Rosemary, Lord and Lady Chey Chase, and then to Lady Mayrose, I think there would be a scandal which would put our immaculate enemy in a new light before his admirers."

"Yes, I will go to Springfield to-morrow morning," muttered Grace in a hard exulting voice as she folded the letters and put them into her pocket.

But then Prince Casino spoke, lifting up his hands in strange amazement—

"Ah mon dieu ! zese Englishmen zey are all ze same ! Zey walk about with ze Holy Bible under zeir arms, and when you look you find zey have all some female skeleton in zeir cupboard !"

CHAPTER III.

A DISPLAY OF FORCE.

Anyone who had seen Grace Marvell dress for her expedition to Springfield would have thought she was going to see somebody whose admiration, and not whose fear and hatred, she wished to excite.

She put on a black velvet dress profusely flounced with lace, and a jacket richly trimmed with Siberian sable. Her bonnet was of velvet, with a trimming of grey ostrich feathers ; and as it was small, after the modern fashion, it seemed to be imbedded in the clusters of her splendid chestnut hair crimped up around it. She wore pearl-grey gloves, to match with the feathers in her bonnet ; and by some contrivance known to ladies the velvet dress could be looped up in front for walking, over an underskirt of grey quilted satin ; but it could not be looped up behind, where it flowed majestically for a yard or two, being presumably not meant for walking.

Lady Canonlaugh was to accompany Grace to Springfield for propriety's sake, but to remain outside in the landau during the visit. She was a handsome woman, too, despite her sanctimonious virtues, and arrayed herself more sumptuously than ever now, out of Grace's money. Lord Canonlaugh had never been rich, and, since his circumstances had become reduced owing to his lavish expenditure in secret "good works," as his friends piously put it, his wife had extended her income by the traditional means of patronizing city ladies, presenting them at court, and so forth. She had concluded a very straightforward bargain with Grace, from whom she was to receive £2,000 for a twelve month's chaperonage, and another £2,000 as bonus on presenting her at the next Birthday Drawing-room. *Il n'y a pas de sot metier*, as our friends over the channel say.

The two ladies started for Springfield very soon after nine, and in less than twenty minutes their carriage passed the lodge gates and swept up the avenue. Grace had often crossed Springfield Park in her walks while she was teacher at the Penny village schools, but she had never entered the quadrangle of the Hall. It's princely grandeur impressed her. She had sat very erect driving through the Penny grounds and through Hiveborough ; for, encountering at every step persons who had known her in her humbler days, she loved, womanwise, to show them a proud face now, and to ignore them haughtily, or to bow to them with queenly condescension, according as they boorishly stared at her or lifted their hats. But Springfield Hall made her feel humble ; it was so exactly the place over which she would have desired to rule could she have fulfilled her ambition ! The spired chapel to the right, and the ancient banqueting-hall to the left rose with stately beauty in the sunlit air, speaking of a nobility which was not of yesterday, and of lordship acquired by other methods than money hunting.

As the carriage shot through the quadrangle gateway, flanked by its two tall towers, a telegraph boy scampered over the grass-plat, bearing one of those 300-word messages which haunt the rural retreats of Cabinet Ministers. Before the landau could reach the flight of steps in front of the main block of buildings, a footman in black silk stockings, epaulettes, and aiglets, issued, and ran down the steps to ascertain the visitor's good pleasure. But Lord Mayrose was not at home.

"His Lordship went out on horseback about ten minutes ago, ma'am, but did not leave word whether he should return before mid-day," said the domestic. "His Lordship is going up to London by the one o'clock train to attend a Cabinet Council. Lady Mayrose is indoors, ma'am."

The Countess intimated that it was Lord Mayrose who was in request, but added, unconcernedly, that she should call another day, and ordered that the coachman should drive home. The landau broke into motion again, and swept round the drive, but once it was clear of the quadrangle Lady Canonlaugh turned to

Grace, who was crestfallen, and said hurriedly, "Depend on it, Lord Mayrose has gone to see that minx of a girl. If we go towards Elmwood we shall be almost sure to overtake him or meet him as he returns. Shall we try?"

"By all means," answered Grace, rallying; and she pulled the check-string. A front window was let down, and before the footman had time to alight, the coachman was told to drive towards Elmwood at his best speed.

The distance from Springfield to the outskirts of Elmwood Park was about fifteen miles; but the roads were good, and Sir Ham's horses were tall, strong animals, stepping capitably. They were not four minutes clearing the first mile, and here there was a toll-gate, where Lady Canonlaugh enquired whether Lord Mayrose had passed that morning. His lordship had ridden by about a quarter of an hour before, said the toll woman; and a similar answer was received at another gate, seven miles further on, only this time the pursued peer had obtained half an hour's advance. "Never mind," remarked Lady Canonlaugh, "we are sure to fall in with him."

It was extraordinary, this pleasure which the Countess took in the prospective discomfiture of a man who had never offended her; but have we not all met with persons whose principal happiness is derived from the misfortunes of their neighbours? Lady Canonlaugh had first joined in the outcry against Mayrose because it was the fashionable thing to do among her set, and because when anybody's doings were impugned on moral grounds her ladyship was always foremost in the clamour, on a well-known principle common to those who cry "Stop thief!" By and bye the marked contempt which Mayrose's wife had evinced towards her on several occasions, and especially the spiteful little epigram which she had one evening launched against her, had converted the strife into a woman's animosity, desperately venomous; and now Lady Canonlaugh had an extra reason for plotting against Mayrose in her desire to aid Grace. As for Grace herself, it was not surprising that she should stand up for the imperilled Loan with all her might. The loan was her work, and her feminine vanity was interested in its not turning out a disastrous speculation; besides, now that Sir Ham was evidently tottering towards his grave, Grace's future husband had diplomatically hinted the desirability of looking with vigilance after the old Knight's money, seeing that every farthing of it would devolve upon her. There was no doubt that she would be Sir Ham's sole heiress; she wished to be so now, first for Prince Casino's sake, and secondly to frustrate Mayrose of the inheritance; but there was evidently some secret and deeper motive for her rancour against the peer than could be seen on the surface.

So the landau thundered over the roads, and with its speed rose the excitement of this man-chase. Villages were passed, roadside inns with painted sign-boards, barns covered with posters of the recent election, and droves of mooring cattle plodding to market. Once or twice groups of fox-hunters riding to meet in pink were overtaken and passed, and then a batch of sportsmen climbing over a stile with guns on their shoulders to go and make their best of the coverts before the new People's Parliament effected a ruthless sweep of all game laws. The morning was gloriously fine, and the horses were little tired by the sharpness of their pace. In about an hour and a quarter the palisades round Elmwood Park came in view, and beside a lodge gate a young bumpkin was seen walking up and down, leading a horse by the bridle.

"That is Lord Mayrose's horse," broke out Lady Canonlaugh. "We are fortunate; I know the place where the pair meet, and if we go into the park we may stand behind the trees and hear them say good-bye. You can accost my lord immediately afterwards."

The carriage stopped, the ladies descended, and the coachman was told to turn round and wait a couple of hundred yards further down the road. Lady Canonlaugh led the way, and pushed back the lodge gate, which was only closed by a latch, then struck across a track of turf and so into a small wood. Grace followed as fast as her trailing dress would permit.

Both ladies cut rather odd figures stepping over the wet ground in their rich attire. The grass was strewn with brown chestnut leaves, and yellow leaves of acacia water-soaked, with prickly husks of horse-chestnuts and beech-nuts, and with

rotten twigs which cracked under their feet. From the tree branches above drops of water fell on them as the sun was melting the night's hoar-frost, and a slow persisting sound of dripping was heard everywhere around.

Lady Canonlaugh's ardour put her in spirits, and made her active. She knew her way and went straight, lifting up her long skirts, but displaying no care to choose her path. Full five minutes she walked, then, suddenly putting her finger on her lips, halted, to allow Grace to reach her. "There, to the left!" she whispered. Grace looked and saw a piece of ornamental water, surmounted by some artificial rockwork which formed a cascade. Above the rocks was a belvedere, like a small Grecian temple, which in summer was doubtless used for picnics, or as shelter against storms. It was evident that from the height a view of the country for miles round could be obtained, and it was consequently a good trysting-place for any lovers who had cause to fear surprises. They would have been able to fly long before the searchers whom they had sighted could reach them.

"That is where they are," murmured Lady Canonlaugh. "They may have perceived the carriage coming down the road, but they have not seen us approaching, for we were masked by the trees, and then they don't suspect they have been watched. Let us wait here—we shall see them come out."

Grace instinctively held her breath, and the next quarter of an hour, during which she was obliged to stand still, seemed a weary while to her impatience. She hugged her sable muff closer to her, and as the blood had rushed to her face she felt her feet growing cold. Her companion remained impassive, and several times allayed Grace's fears when the latter mistook the rustling of twigs for advancing footsteps. But at last their watching was rewarded. A violet skirt glanced on the summit of the rocks, and Zellie Carol appeared with Mayrose at her side. She had a half veil over her face, and Mayrose preceded her by a few steps, to assist her in descending the steep. Resting one hand confidently on his arm, she held up the other buried in her seal-skin muff to balance herself, and by quick stages she reached the foot of the ascent. Here, however, there must have been a brook or ditch, for Mayrose took Zellie by the waist and lifted her over the obstacle, then they advanced together into the open, and Lady Canonlaugh, pulling at Grace's sleeves, ejaculated under her breath, "Now see them!"

Never guessing they were being watched, the two lovers had paused to say good-bye. They had joined hands, and at the moment of parting Zellie put up her face and Mayrose kissed her. Lady Canonlaugh broke into a dry and well-pleased laugh; and, pointing to Zellie, who had walked away rapidly in the direction of a female figure which had emerged from behind some trees. "There, that is her maid, the jade who sold me the letters, and who mounts guard for them. You can join Mayrose now, dear, and I will go back to the carriage and wait for you. Good hope and luck!"

If the blessings of such women as Lady Canonlaugh inspire trustfulness, Grace must have walked forward confidently enough. Anyhow she left her shelter with deliberate steps, and went to meet Mayrose as he returned by a by-path leading to the wood. She had about a hundred yards of ground to cross, and Mayrose did not see her, for he had turned his back to the wind to light a cigar. When he had thrown away his fusee, he came straight along with downcast eyes but quick steps, dressed in a shooting-coat and hat, and switching a riding-whip in his hands. He did not become aware of Grace's presence till he was close to her, and then he stopped.

"You here, Miss Marvell?"

"Yes, my lord; I have come on purpose to meet you."

"You know I was here, then?"

"Yes; I have been watching you since you took leave of Lady Azalea Carol."

He threw an astonished glance at her, but it was one more of enquiry than of alarm. "Your business must be very pressing?" he said.

"It is very pressing," answered Grace, a little disconcerted by his calmness, and for a moment or two she remained silent to collect herself for what she was going to say. Then, looking fixedly at him: "Lord Mayrose, I am going to ask you a

service which, I trust, you will grant in the interest of your father-in-law's fortune, which is menaced."

Mayrose made no reply, and Grace proceeded to prefer her request. The peer had turned, and the two walked slowly side by side away from the lodge-gate, he listening and she continuing to speak in a tone which she meant to be firm but which was spasmodical. Mayrose's cold, nonchalant politeness disturbed her more and more. She had expected some exclamation, some token of impatience or aversion which should have given her the mastery and afforded her a pretext for raising her voice. But her interlocutor's attitude was that of the perfect man of the world—surprised or frightened at nothing. He lent ear to everything she had to say without pronouncing a word; and it was only when Grace had finished speaking that he remarked coldly:

"If I have understood you rightly, you wish me to advise the condonation of two revolting murders in order that a speculation in which you have an interest may not suffer?"

"I want more than that, Lord Mayrose," rejoined Grace, positively; "I think you can lend your influence to getting Rio-Brigande recognized by the British Government, and ought to do it. The act would consolidate the power of Senor Descamisado, and do more good to English investors than if you exacted heavy atonement from such a weak State for two murders which, after all, appear to have been accidental."

"I must remind you that I am not Foreign Secretary, Miss Marvell."

"That is only a subterfuge. You have quite power enough in the Cabinet to do what you choose."

"I probably shall not choose to do what you require. I have been informed of that Rio-Brigande outrage, and if the question is discussed in the Cabinet, I shall have to consider other issues than that of your fortune."

"Your father-in-law's fortune, if you please—not mine."

"I believe it is much the same thing, Miss Marvell."

Grace bit her lips, reddening, and paused.

"Am I to conclude, then, that you refuse my demands?"

"I must decline to go into any matter of Government with you—that is all."

"That is official evasion, my lord. But you seem to forget that I can force you to be explicit!" exclaimed Grace, with animation. "What if I acquainted your wife and Lady Rosemary with what I have seen this morning—what if I told them that you constantly hold meetings with Lady Azalea Carol in that summer-house?"

"You may do so if you please," said Mayrose, quietly. "Your affirmation would not weigh for an instant against my formal denial."

"My solitary affirmation might not, but I can produce a witness who saw you!"

"If that witness be Lady Canonlaugh, who lives with you, her evidence would be worth even less than yours, and I do not advise Lady Canonlaugh to do anything which would drive me to reprisals."

"Upon my word, Lord Mayrose, you seem to have learned to consider yourself invulnerable in office!" cried Grace, with a sarcastic laugh.

She was growing exasperated under that imperturbable coolness which is the most irritating weapon that can be used against a woman.

"So you defy me," added she, tauntingly, "and you are ready to deny a fact sworn to by two witnesses—you, the man of stainless honour, who have been lifted up as an example to other men! But there are things against which even the denial of one so pure as yourself will not avail, Lord Mayrose. I happen to possess two letters, one written by yourself, the other by Lady Azalea Carol—two love letters—which would place you in strange embarrassment, if made use of by me!"

"You have no such letters," said Mayrose, quite calmly.

"I beg to assure you of the contrary," said Grace: "and what is more, I swear these letters shall be shown to your wife and Lady Rosemary, if you continue to dare me!"

"I dare you to produce any letters that are not forgeries," was Mayrose's tranquil answer, and he composedly flipped away the ash of his cigar which he had allowed to become exhausted.

Grace stood and quivered with baffled fury and doubt. Mayrose's indifference was so complete that she came to wonder whether Lady Canonlaugh had not been misled as to the authenticity of the letters. For a moment she hesitated, then, resolving to convince herself by one stroke whether Mayrose's security was real or assumed, she plunged her hand into her pocket and drew out the letters. Retreating some steps, she held up both notes, displayed so that they might be quite out of his reach. "There, Lord Mayrose! do you recognize your handwriting, and the paper stamped with your arms? And do you recognize Lady Azalea's hand? Will you call these letters forgeries now?"

"No!" cried Mayrose, rousing himself up with an abruptness which showed what an effort his previous self-constraint must have cost him. His face glowed upon her with anger and determination. "All I wanted to know, Miss Marvell, was whether your threats were worth heeding. And now you will please to give up those notes."

"Give them up! Never—not to you!"

"Then I shall take them from you by force."

"By force?" laughed Grace, derisively. "O, I have awakened you at last from your apathy! A moment ago you talked of defending yourself by falsehood; now you propose to use your strength against a woman! But I am no weak-limbed girl, and can protect myself." Saying which she restored the letters to her pocket, and placed over the pocket her right hand in the muff.

"If you are strong you will find I am stronger, but I hope you will not put me to the test," replied Mayrose, firmly. "Listen, Miss Marvell: for some time you have been my enemy, I do not know why. When I first became acquainted with you I tried to render you a service, and if I failed it was because the difficulties against which I had to contend were too many for me. No one could regret this more than I did, and I sufficiently proved it, for in taking up your father's case I made myself powerful foes whose vindictiveness is far from being yet appeased. Nevertheless you have not ceased to wish me evil. You circumvented my unhappy father-in-law, and incensed his mind against my wife and me; you have taken possession of his fortune, and I was unable to do my duty in retraining you, for I was so delicately situated that any interference on my part might have been attributed to mercenary motives. What more you have done I cannot exactly conjecture, but there were mysterious circumstances attending the death of my mother-in-law, which are best known to your conscience."

"I suppose you will accuse me of murder, too!" broke out Grace excitedly, and letting slip the word "too" without being conscious of it.

"It appears, then, that somebody *has* already suspected you," retorted Mayrose, casting a cool glance at her. "I do not accuse you, for I have no proofs, and do not desire to wrong you. But now I find you armed with two letters which, in your hands, might be instruments, not of just revenge for any evil I have done, but of wanton enmity, and I must defend myself. On one hand I have to make account of the peace of my wife and of the honour of an eminent family which you would destroy. On the other lies the alternative of forgetting for a moment that you are a woman. I assure you, Miss Marvell, I shall not hesitate."

There was no mistaking the tone in which he had said this, and Grace receded another step; but she laughed provokingly.

"Really, Lord Mayrose, one would think you were addressing a lord-worshipping multitude instead of a woman who can see through all the hypocrisy of your character! You talk of the peace of your wife and the honour of the Carols; I suppose you were consulting that peace and honour when you made of Lady Azalea your mistress?"

"Lady Azalea and myself are both innocent of the degradation you impute to us," replied Mayrose, without anger. "If I were speaking to anyone but yourself I should prove this; but as I am indifferent to your good opinion I shall not undertake a justification. I must ask you to return those letters."

"I shall not return them, Lord Mayrose; and if you make another step forward I shall scream for help and denounce you."

Mayrose looked around. "Pray consider that we are half a mile from any human ear, and resistance will not help you in the least."

This was true. In strolling along they had passed the confines of the wood, crossed a path, and were now close to a clump of oaks. Grace turned her glance about and saw some sheep browsing in the distance, the trees before her denuded of their leaves, the steeple of a church a full mile away. She was frightened; and yet—half daunted by the demeanour of this man who threatened her—she felt a thrill run over her which was not of terror. There rose before her the recollection of the days when she had stood alone with him and pleaded for her father. Other thoughts than those of her father's wrongs had invaded her mind then, but he had been cold as a judge, and she had left him with a rankling sense of being spurned, which had never been obliterated. And now, with a woman's admiration of his fearlessness—aye, and for his scorn of her—she found him tenfold more manly than he had seemed to her on that day when she had become his enemy.

"Miss Marvell, I ask you again, will you return me those letters?"

"No," panted Grace.

Mayrose dropped his riding-whip and cigar, and advanced fastening his eyes on hers as if he were going to wrestle with a man. Fascinated by his gaze, she clutched her pocket with one hand, and raised the other to protect herself. She might have struck him, but her wrist in descending fell into a grasp firm yet soft as the padded manacles used to shackle the insane. With gentle painless force he drew the imprisoned hand behind her back, unclasped the fingers of the other, which clung to the velvet of her dress, and having enclosed both wrists in his right hand, he dipped his left into her pocket. The touch of a professional searcher could not have been lighter than his, as he felt for the letters and recovered them. During this time Grace did not struggle. She set her teeth, stiffened her limbs into rigidity, and threw back her flushed face, closing her eyes. When Mayrose had released her she clenched her hand and gasped hysterically, "Oh, you coward!"

Mayrose had stooped to pick up her muff, which had fallen. He brushed it with his sleeve, and restored it to her.

"I am really sorry that you should have driven me to this extremity, Miss Marvell. You cannot be more ashamed of this scene than I am; but in a better mood you will recognize that you left me no option. Your shortest way out of the grounds lies by that bridle-path. Good morning."

CHAPTER IV.

"NIL CONSCIRE SIBI NULLA PALLESCERE CULPA."

When Grace returned to her carriage she was like a woman who has been struck, but Lady Canonlaugh could obtain no details from her as to what had passed. She sat huddled in a corner and stared out of the window, her lips twitching convulsively. It was not the loss of the two letters which filled her with rage and humiliation, but the thought of the unlimited contempt which Mayrose must have felt for her to have dared offer her violence as he had done. He had treated her like a common criminal, or like a noxious animal that must be muzzled—he who she knew would not have dared lift even a rough glance on any woman whom he had respected. Lady Canonlaugh's curiosity simmered into fidgets when she saw two tears start from Grace's eyes and roll down her cheeks. At that moment Grace was muttering: "He despises me; well, so much the worse for him! When I have blasted his life, and brought him to his knees at my feet, perhaps he will repent and wish he had made a friend of me."

Meanwhile, Mayrose, having turned his back upon Grace, paused under the oaks to watch her leave the park. Then he drew his watch—it was a quarter past eleven, and he had arranged to catch the one o'clock train from Hiveborough, to attend the Cabinet Council in London. "I can't help it," he murmured, "I am bound to warn Zellie;" and he set off running across the park at full speed, clear-

ing a brook and a flight of hurdles in his course, and making a flock of sheep scamper away in affright before him. Luckily, Zellie had gone to visit the sick child of a lodge-keeper before returning home, and Mayrose came in sight of her and her maid when they were still half a mile from the Hall. An instinct seemed to apprise Zellie that she was being followed, for she abruptly stopped and glanced round. Perceiving Mayrose, she left her maid and walked rapidly to meet him. There was a smile on her lips, but a look of apprehension also.

"Zellie, what I have long feared has happened!" panted Mayrose. "We have been spied upon, and Lady Canonlaugh and Miss Marvell are in possession of our secret. I have just been threatened."

"I am not afraid of Lady Canonlaugh," answered Zellie, promptly.

"But I am, dear, for both our sakes, and it is absolutely necessary that we should cease to see each other until I can devise some plan for our meeting in safety. We must be prepared now to be denounced through anonymous letters."

The smile had faded from Zellie's face, and she was pouting like a spoiled child who is being balked of some pleasure.

"You know we have nothing to fear from anonymous letters. When our meetings began I asked papa to let me act as his secretary—all the letters he receives pass through my hands, and you see those that are sent to your wife."

"We can neither of us be sure of seeing all the letters that are sent, darling. Lord Rosemary is in London now, and may receive a letter at his office or club; and a note can be delivered to my wife whilst I am away. I assure you we must be careful, for our enemies are determined. See, here are a couple of our letters which Miss Marvell procured somehow—from your maid, as I suppose."

Zellie turned the letters over. "Oh, the false-hearted creature!" she exclaimed. "Why, Stitchett told me this letter had been blown out of her hand as she was crossing Elnwood Bridge, and she came back asking me to write another. Your letter I never saw at all, for she brought me a verbal message, with the excuse that you were too busy to write. I'll dismiss her this day!"

"No; that's the last thing to be thought of; don't even reproach the woman. We must pay her twice as well in the future; that's all. But you see, dear, how completely we are at other people's mercy. I shall reflect to-day on what had best be done, and hope to send Leech with a note to you to-morrow."

Zellie, however, had relapsed into her petulant mood. Her eyes were cast on the ground, and she pushed a hole in the gravel of the pathway with the point of her small boot.

"I see what it is, Freddy," she said, mournfully, "You have grown tired of our meetings, and want a pretext for breaking off with me."

"That is unreasonable, Zellie," replied Mayrose, quite gently. "You know it has always given me the utmost pleasure to meet you."

"Pleasure! Oh, you talk of it in those cold words, when it is a matter of life and death to me. Men don't imagine what we girls can suffer! I shall go home now and fancy all sorts of things. Just this moment I suspected that these letters might never have fallen into anybody's hands, but that you had invented that story to frighten me. You see what a state of mind I am in, and it is cruel to torment me in that way."

"Don't let yourself be tormented, dear. Go home quietly, and put faith in me. You know I have never deceived you."

Zellie was crying.

"No, you have never deceived me," she sobbed; "and oh, Freddy, don't alter towards me. If you grow tired of me, don't let me see it. Bear with me in pity, for my life would end if you abandoned me."

"You know what our compact is, Zellie," said Mayrose, affectionately, but very gravely. "I promised we should continue to see each other until you yourself put an end to our meetings; and I left you sole judge as to the moment for doing this."

"Yes, yes; but it cannot be for a long time yet," faltered Zellie, quickly, as she clung to his arm and nestled her head against his shoulder. "Some day when I am stronger; but at present I am weak, and the effort would break me. I never

knew what happiness was till within these last months ; and it is too soon, dearest—much too soon—to destroy my short glimpse of paradise.”

“Whatever promise I make you, dear, I shall adhere to at any risk to myself,” answered Mayrose, taking Zellie’s handkerchief out of her hands, and softly drying her eyes ; and after he had soothed her with a few more words he parted from her, kissing her, as before, on the forehead.”

Any eavesdropper who should have witnessed the above scene would have noticed that Zellie’s manner was like that of a person lately recovered from a mental disorder, and he would have seen that Mayrose’s demeanour towards her was characterized chiefly by its studied patience. But the eavesdropper would have concluded, as Lady Canonlaugh had done, that the relations between a married man and a young girl who thus held stolen meetings, with a servant maid for their accomplice, were full of guilt.

The eavesdropper would have been wrong. After that unhappy day when she had been goaded by her despair into attempting Lord Hornette’s life, Zellie had fled to Mayrose, and in a paroxysm of remorse and wildness poured out her confession, and declared to him that she could not master her love. Mayrose then endured an hour of horrible temptation. Thinking that Zellie’s crime would quickly become public, he was sorely moved by the devil to elope with her, and live for the rest of his days in foreign seclusion ; but he conquered this temptation—conquered it by one of those strong, heart-wringing efforts which are surely accounted of more worth above than the blamelessness of those who have never been tempted. He dismissed Zellie by fixing her an appointment for the morrow, and this gave him the time to learn that Zellie’s act of folly would not become public. Lord Hornette kept his secret like a man of honour. Violet and her husband might have suspicions, but they held no proofs ; and, besides, they were interested above all others in hushing up so shocking a matter. The secret, therefore, would rest between the Earl, Zellie, and Mayrose himself.

There seemed to be, then, but one course open to Mayrose, and that the conventional one. Zellie was not responsible for what she did—the madness of love had stricken her. She would certainly tempt him again and again, and, determined as he was to withstand a passion which would lead to so much scandal and disaster, one might think that his clear duty was to lay all the facts of the case before Lady Rosemary. Yes, but what have been the results of this course ? It is easy to say that a man should go and acquaint a mother with a daughter’s aberration and misconduct, but if Mayrose had done this the Countess would have had no alternative but to go abroad, heart-broken and hopeless, with Zellie, or to place the afflicted child under restraint ; and then Zellie must have pined herself into consumption or hysterical lunacy. Exile or confinement is no cure for such passion as Zellie’s, and Mayrose felt that on his decision depended the life of the poor young creature who had given him her love when it was too late for him to accept it.

He took another course, one that was recommended to him by no precedent that he had ever heard of, but was suggested by his deep compassion and his earnest desire to rescue both Zellie and himself. Knowing that passion is stimulated by obstacles, but often yields to an unrestrained intercourse of an innocent character, he resolved to see Zellie often and to try and establish his relations with her on a permanent footing as between brother and sister. It was a part bristling with difficulties that he had to play, for if he had shown any affectation of coldness he must have fanned the flame which he wished to allay, women being all alike in this particular whatever may be their rank or training. He had to show himself natural, cheerful, and ever-affectionate without ardour. He had to avoid arousing Zellie’s jealousy by alluding unguardedly to his wife, and to refrain from feeding her admiration for himself by emitting any of those brilliant sentiments that dazzle women. He made himself humdrum with the object of gradually disenchanting her ; he talked with familiar prosiness about his daily doings and about hers ; and if ever the conversation neared sentimental ground, he brought it skilfully back to that air of lightness and brotherly good humour which surrounds love topics with a cooling breeze and renders them almost inaccessible. God knows what this self-discip-

line must have cost him at first, but little by little he tutored himself to keep every look of his eye, every intonation of his voice under control, so that he came to perform his task with a facility that surprised himself.

Mayrose watched every symptom of Zellie's revival with a keenness like diagnosis; and such are the blessed effects of self-subduing that so far as he himself was concerned he felt his passion slowly transform itself into friendly affection. He also had the inexpressible relief of seeing Zellie's health return, her spirits rise, and her interest in life come back; so that, although she would still on occasions give way to fretfulness and dejection, he began to cherish the hope of inducing her some day to marry. He would have advised her to marry either Lord Heigho or Mr. Dexter, had he thought one of those two would have made her happy; but he knew that the husband required was one who would entirely devote himself to his wife, and bear very long-sufferingly with her at first. Quilpin Leech, he thought, would have been just such a man but for his unaccountable attachment to Grace Marvell, and Mayrose had already once or twice thrown him and Zellie together in the trust that they might learn to like each other, for he was persuaded that Lady Rosemary would now give her consent to Zellie's marriage with any undoubted gentleman. And if only Zellie could be induced to marry, everything might come right; the affection of her husband and the birth of children would weave new hopes and joys around her, and complete the cure which Mayrose had undertaken resolutely, yet with an anxiety and misgiving which words are quite inadequate to render.

Things had reached this pass when Lady Canonlaugh's discovery came and exploded the security in which the suspected lovers had been living for almost four months.

On quitting Zellie, Mayrose galloped homewards across fields at steeple-chasing pace, and contrived to reach Springfield with just forty minutes to spare to lunch and drive to the station. He at once sought Mary, who was going through her household accounts in her morning room, and asked her whether she would come up to town with him.

"I think the trip will do you good, dear, and I shall be glad of your society."

Mary jumped up with alacrity. When left alone she often fell into melancholy on account of her father, and to be with her husband was her only notion of happiness.

"I will get ready at once, dear. Shall we go to Berkeley Square?"

"No, to the Clarendon, I think. It is not worth while taking up all the servants for a two or three days' visit."

Mary vanished, and in ten minutes reappeared in travelling dress with her reticule, having directed her maid to follow by a later train with all those boxes which are indispensable to ladies even when leaving home but for half a week. The phaeton was at the door, and Mayrose drove fast. He arrived at the station with five minutes to spare, and after handing Mary into a reserved carriage, had time to send a telegram ordering the coachman whom he kept in town for such emergencies to be in waiting with a brougham at the terminus.

Mayrose's object in taking his wife to London was, of course, to remove her from the possibility of receiving visits or letters from Lady Canonlaugh or Grace during his absence. He saw clearly now that a game had begun in which all his prospects and reputation and the happiness of his wife were at stake. If Grace succeeded in proving his long established relations with Zellie, no one would believe that those relations were pure, and his character would crash down in irremediable ruin. He would have to endure reproach and shame in their most blighting form, and even if he succeeded in convincing Lady Rosemary of Zellie's innocence, she would still adjudge him guilty of most reckless imprudence. In endeavouring to reclaim Zellie, Mayrose had proposed to himself the noblest task that could be undertaken by a generous heart, but such tasks can only be justified by the most complete success, and even when they have succeeded the details of them must be kept an eternal secret, for the world does not believe in miracles.

The train that bore Mayrose to London was a full one, for people were hurrying to London from all quarters of the kingdom, and every passenger held a newspaper in which he read the surprising results of the General Election, and the be-

wildered leaders thereon. At the terminus Mayrose, with Mary on his arm, contrived to make his way through the crowd on the platform without recognition; but in crossing the booking-office he was stumbled upon by Mr. Deedes, who was hurrying towards a departing train with a ticket in his hand.

"Oh, my lord, I was just going down to see you on important business!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Let me put Lady Mayrose into her carriage, Mr. Deedes, and you shall drive down with me to Downing street, if you like."

Mayrose helped his wife into the brougham, and having despatched her to the Clarendon climbed into a hansom with the lawyer, who lost no time in unfolding his woeful budget.

"My lord, it was about your father-in-law that I desired to speak to you. I suppose we must take it that this morning's news from Rio Brigande involves the collapse of the Loan, but you may not be aware that in that case Sir Ham Pennywaddle will be entirely ruined!"

"He will lose the value of his shares, I presume."

"Oh, if that were all, it would be a comparative trifle," answered Mr. Deedes, speaking instinctively in a whisper, though the cab was rattling. "I regret to say that Sir Ham is heavily in debt. Although I still nominally manage his concerns, my advice has been disregarded for a long time past by that designing girl who holds your unhappy father-in-law in her thralldom. It seems that in raising funds to meet his Rio-Brigande bills, Sir Ham not only parted with all his property, personal and real, but borrowed money right and left at usurious interest. He has no assets whatever but his loan scrip, and if this fails him he must face bankruptcy."

Mayrose was not prepared for this. He had never known the exact total of Sir Ham's fortune, and thought him still rich. His heart sank, for he saw ruin coming upon him, not in one shape alone, but in many. When once there is a crack in the dyke the waters pour in from all quarters.

"Well, Mr. Deedes, it is dreary news, but I cannot help it," he answered, with a calmness that cloaked an anguish which the lawyer little suspected; "if my father-in-law has debts, I shall owe it to my wife and myself to pay them. I received five hundred thousand pounds on my marriage; I will restore that money, that is all, and we shall be quits."

Mr. Deedes coughed and fidgetted. "Excuse me, my lord, but isn't there another way? Forgive me for saying that it is notorious that you can do what you please with the Cabinet. Now, as a fleet will certainly be sent out to demand satisfaction for the murder of these two Englishmen, couldn't it at the same time take in hand the interests of British bondholders, and insist upon sound guarantees for the repayment of the loan?"

"I think no Minister will even propose such a thing," replied Mayrose, coldly. "We can't employ our fleet to recover the small debts owing to unscrupulous or foolish speculators."

"But, my lord, your father-in-law lent the money in perfect good faith, and the bondholders had reason to believe that their Government would not suffer them to be wantonly despoiled."

"They will find out their mistake, and it is to be hoped learn more caution from the lesson. You see, Mr. Deedes, if Government once let itself be drawn into exacting the payment of loans which it had not guaranteed, Ministers would soon be the dupes of a pack of swindlers—many of them foreigners probably—who would use the British name as a thing to trade with. In this case we have only to demand satisfaction to our insulted flag, and an indemnity to the families of the two murdered men; the rest does not concern us."

"But—but—I assure you, Lord Mayrose, this is an exceptional conjuncture, and if whilst he was about it the British Admiral insisted for Loan guarantees, it would not cost the nation a penny more."

"Pardon me, Mr. Deedes; it would cost a principle. I don't wish to speak like a copy-book text, but a principle is worth something nowadays."

Mr. Deedes nibbled the tips of his black kid gloves. His consternation was

far greater than that of Mayrose, who was pleading so stubbornly against his own interests.

"My lord," he repeated, entreatingly, "I do beseech you to consider. By one word, and a word of which everyone would approve, you can save the Loan and your father-in-law. If you refuse to pronounce that word, Sir Ham must be ruined, and I must warn you that I am not sure whether the whole of your five hundred thousand pounds would suffice to pay Sir Ham's debts; his affairs are so embarrassed!"

A slight spasm shot over Mayrose's face, but he never wavered.

"Mr. Deedes, I think you will respect me the more if I dismiss all these arguments from my mind," he replied, with amicable firmness. "Let us draw a line between public and private questions. My public duty happens to lie one way, and my private interests another. I am sorry for it; but if my father-in-law is ruined I will endeavour to pay his debts; if he is left without a home, I will give him one under my roof. I can do no more."

The cab stopped at this moment. Mayrose alighted and shook hands with Mr. Deedes, and the lawyer watched him walk tranquilly through the doors of the Treasury.

"He talks of giving back the five hundred thousand pounds!" ejaculated the lawyer, aghast; "egad! he will do it, and beggar himself too, if I don't prevent him!"

CHAPTER V.

STORMY POLITICS.

The next day it was known to all whom it might concern that Government would not enforce the claims of British bondholders, but that Rear-Admiral Cracknell, in command of the Atlantic squadron, would visit Rio-Brigande for the purpose of demanding (1) an indemnity of £20,000 for the families of each of the murdered Englishmen, (2) a public salute to the British flag by the Rio-Brigandian troops and by the President of the Republic, (3) the public execution of all who had taken part in the murders. Nothing could be plainer; but considering that the murderers were some of Senor Descamisado's pet colonels, who would have straightway joined the Opposition and overturned him had he proposed to shoot them, the demands of the British Government were tantamount to obliging Senor Descamisado to fly the country. He did fly as soon as the intentions of England were made known to him by a telegram *via* New York from Prince Casino; and three months later he turned up in a smart mansion in Paris, where he has lived ever since, widely respected for his Republican principles and his fortune of £100,000 a year. When Admiral Cracknell reached Rio-Brigande he found Senor Pantalonas, late chief of the Opposition, installed as President, and this patriot hastened to give Great Britain all the satisfaction that was required. A negro who had had nothing to do with the murders, but had been caught walking through the streets at the time of their perpetration, was hanged with great ceremony, in presence of the crews of Her Majesty's ships *Formidable*, *Invincible*, and *Vigilant*, after which the Rio-Brigandian army presented arms to the Union Jack, under the command of General Sombrero, the principal murderer, who had become Minister of War under the new Administration, and who wound up the day's proceedings by dining with Rear-Admiral Cracknell on board the flag-ship. As for the £40,000 claimed for the families of the victims, both families received a Treasury Bond and they have been trying to get it cashed to this day. At the last advices they had complained in Downing-street, and had been told that their best remedy was to institute civil proceedings in the High Court of Rio-Brigande.

So much for events across the Atlantic. In London it was understood at once that the refusal of the Government to espouse the interests of bondholders disposed of the Loan for good and all. At mid-day Rio-Brigandian Securities were struck off the quotations of the Stock Exchange, and a score of half-pay officers, old maids, and retired tradesmen, who had staked all their savings on the belief in twelve per

cent., prepared to pass an examination in Basinghall-street. Sir Ham Pennywoddle was ruined; so was Sir Joel Jiddledubbin, who denounced Pennywoddle as a thief. Robgroschen and Prince Casino came off with a profit of £40,000 or so apiece. Lady Canonlaugh and Grace had each cleared about £10,000; but the Prince and the two ladies, ascribing the failure of the Loan to Mayrose, were hot upon revenge. Lady Canonlaugh answered the remonstrances of divers feminine friends who had clung to their scrip in hopes of a rise, by declaring that Mayrose had made enormous profits out of the Loan and had smashed the speculation because he did not see his way to gaining anything more. Among ladies to whom she had not recommended the Loan she pretended to have had no hand in such a gross swindle; and she added, "on good authority," that Mayrose having netted a million, tried very desperately to get the claims of bondholders taken up by the Cabinet, in order that he might net a second million; but that he had been overruled by his colleagues—all which was believed by a large section of Society, for the tendency to regard a Cabinet Minister as a private rascal is one of the most irresistible impulses of human nature.

Amid all this Mayrose passed three days in anguish, apprehending dangers of every sort, and living on his guard. The papers had announced his arrival with his wife, at the Clarendon, and on reflection he removed to his own house, feeling he might take better measures there against Mary's receiving anonymous letters or visits from any of his enemies. Although he saw that his presence in town was becoming indispensable for political reasons, he avoided summoning all his servants from the country, but stationed Bino in his front hall to receive letters, and to inform visitors that Mary was not at home except when he himself was in. He gave as a pretext to Bino that Mary was not in good health, and had need of rest, but he felt acutely the degradation of having to lie to his servant. What must be the feelings of a man of heart who has involved himself in some intrigue of which he is ashamed, and who is obliged to make of menials his confidants!

After three days an anonymous letter came by post addressed to Mary, and recounting all the particulars of her husband's interviews with Zellie. Mayrose ordered a lock to be put on the letter-box of his door to make doubly sure that no communication should accidentally slip through Bino's hands, and being now persuaded that the denunciators would rest for at least a week to watch the effect of their work, he was in a manner relieved. Meantime Quilpin Leech had been twice sent down to Elmwood, nominally with presents of books and flowers to Lady Rosemary, really with notes to Zellie, and the second time he returned with a letter containing a denunciation which had been sent to the Countess, and which Zellie had waylaid.

Until then Mayrose had not taken Leech into his confidence. In sending him with notes to Zellie he had pretended that as Lady Azalea was acting as private secretary to her father he corresponded with her on official matters; but now the situation was growing too serious for reticence, and Mayrose made a clear breast of it to his cousin, entreating him if he had any influence with Grace Marvell to restrain her from the fell work she was pursuing.

"The girl used to be a flame of yours, Leech; can't you tell her what infernal wickedness it is to act as she is doing?"

"She is still a flame of mine," responded Leech, dismally; "but I have no influence over her; we have not seen each other for some time. She is going to marry that Italian, and I am sure it is he who is instigating her to mischief."

"It is natural you should think so if you still care for the girl," said Mayrose, at a loss to understand such blindness; "but if she is really being made to behave contrary to her own impulses, appeal to what good sentiments may be left in her and ask her what profit she will get when she has exploded my life and broken my wife's heart."

Quilpin Leech went off on his mission much agitated and harrowed: but as he would not believe in Grace's perversity, he did more harm than good by calling on Prince Casino, and threatening in a dry conversational way to horsewhip him if any trouble fell upon Lord or Lady Mayrose through his agency. The Prince instantly started off to lay his woes before his affianced, and Grace seeing that she had suc-

ceeded in alarming her enemy, triumphed, and prepared to strike another blow with redoubled zest. Mayrose was not made aware, however, of what Leech had done; and remarking how great was his cousin's devotion, how patiently he would sit with Mary for hours to keep her company whilst he himself was away, and how cheerfully and delicately he discharged his task of carrying notes to Zellie, he felt moved to deep gratitude towards him. One morning he said—

"I promised you that you should have Keane-Rodent's post before we went out, and last night I got the man's resignation from him—after a struggle. He retires on a pension, and I will advise your appointment at the next council."

"I am very much obliged," stammered Leech, reddening; "I am afraid, though, you have surprisingly over-estimated my capacities."

"Not at all. As some king said, if I knew of a better man, I should choose him. You see what I have done at the Africa Office, and I want to leave a permanent secretary who can continue my work after I have left. If Keane-Rodent remained, what little good I have been able to effect would be clean swept away, as it has been at the Australia House, where Keane-Midge still shines."

"It is certain you have done not a little but a great deal of good," exclaimed Leech, not without enthusiasm; "even the clerks admit it, and they are not an appreciative race."

"Well, old fellow, try and do more good of your own. If you slave at your duty with might and main, you will find some satisfaction, even though you get small thanks."

This appointment of Leech to the important office of Permanent Under Secretary, at a salary of £1,500 a year, was made in all conscientiousness: but it was a rare act of imprudence in Mayrose's circumstances. On the face of it, it looked like rampant jobbery, and loud was the cackling among Midges, Rodents and Keane-Foresters, who were like lusty cochin-chinas being compelled to give to a small bantam a share in the meal-saucer which they had long pecked at all to themselves. Mayrose was the best cursed man in England among the second-rate governing cliques; but his unpopularity was also extending like a stain of oil among the lower millions lately enfranchised, and this for a so-called constitutional reason. After a Cabinet Council at which opinions had been much divided it had been resolved that the Ministry would not resign till after the meeting of Parliament, and Mayrose was being made to bear the blame of this decision, which was construed into lordly defiance of the national will.

Now Mayrose's own interest was that the Ministry should resign at once; for with domestic troubles flaring up around him he had little heart for official work, and would gladly have spent at home all the hours he was obliged to lavish on business. But he made it an almost Quixotic point not to let private motives sway his public course. "England is not governed by plebiscite," he said at the council; "it is only conventionally that we know before Parliament meets which way the majority lies. We are the servants of Queen and Parliament, not of the constituencies, and we must wait till Parliament regularly dismisses us."

Mr. Paramount concurred. Lord Lobby, who had a horror of straightforward action, suggested twenty compromises, the immediate summoning of Parliament, the feeling of the public pulse through the newspapers, and so forth. But there was scarcely time to convoke Parliament before Christmas, and the public pulse, as Mayrose urged, had nothing to do with the matter. So in the upshot the Cabinet decided to retain office until the end of January, and the resolution was made known just as the followers of Mr. Paradysse were piously engaged in parting the expected spoils of office among themselves in their earnest chief's dining-room.

Great commotion was the result, and the Ministry were instantly surged against by two contrary currents. The first current was that of gentlemen—defeated candidates for the most part—who wanted peerages; and never had the torrent of these been so violent and noisy. As it was now almost inevitable that the hereditaryness of the peerage would be abolished, every man with a decent estate aspired to be ennobled in time for his heirs to boast that he had belonged to the House of Lords in the day of its glory. There would be no honour in belonging to a House of Life Peers; indeed, the old aristocracy would doubtless thenceforth

make a caste apart from the new, as had happened in all other countries where the privileges—that is, the responsibilities—of the nobility had been swept away by reformers, who did not see that a nobleman becomes twice more haughty, impractical, and obstructive when his rank is stripped of the duties which force him to work for his fellow-countrymen. Mayrose—thanks to his reputed authority in the Cabinet—began to groan under a bombardment of letters, hampers of game, and china vases. Visitors banged at his door all day, ladies despatched him supplicating messages, men button-holed him with ferocity. He sent many of them to the devil, but they had time enough to go there, and one or two of them by heroic importunity actually extorted from him a promise that he would speak to Mr. Paramount, who was himself rushing about London like a lost dog pelted and bawled at from all quarters. One need hardly say that the astute Premier, in drawing up his supreme list of new peers, took party considerations into account. It was settled that Sir Tito Tumb was to become Baron Spinner, and another defeated Minister was to blossom afresh as a Viscount; but the rumour suddenly reached Downing-street that the Duke of Bumblebeigh, who was described as feeling outraged by the results of the elections, might feel less outraged if an Earldom were conferred on his brother, Lord Balbie Drone, and that such an act of justice might pave the way to a reconciliation with the True Blues. Lord Balbie accordingly became Earl of Droneborough without loss of time, and by the same occasion Mr. Paramount gracefully offered the three rows of ermine to Mayrose, doing so in a letter to Mary. But Mayrose declined the proffered honour, for he guessed that he might soon be too poor to keep even his Viscount's coronet well gilt.

Nobiliomania, then, was the result which the Ministerial decision produced among the upper classes, but among the lower a tempest of wrath began to rage. Mobs are moved by blind currents like the sea, which to-day tamely licks the sand on the shore, and to-morrow upheaves huge rocks and floods an island. An indignation meeting was announced to take place in Hyde Park, and something like thirty thousand ragamuffins answered the call of half-a-dozen orators who had forgotten to wash their faces. After the concourse had yelled itself hoarse, it broke up to go and smash the windows of the Ministry; and it may be remarked in passing how happy is the instinct of our mobs in discovering the addresses of their rulers without the help of the Post Office Directory. Fully five thousand exasperated Britons broke off from the procession in Piccadilly and flowed into Berkeley Square towards Mayrose's house.

Mayrose had just come home from luncheon when the first volley of stones came crashing through all his front windows. Panes, mirrors, china flew into shivers; mud bespattered the whole facade, defiled curtains and table-cloths, and meantime a dozen of the more vigorous in their convictions plied their hobnails against the panels of the front door. Bino was not equal to the occasion. A flint-stone smote him in the face as he was carrying a tongue into the dining-room; he let fall the dish with a yelp, and vanished into the kitchen regions. Quilpin Leech instantly caught a chair-screen, covered Mary with it as with a shield, and escorted her to a back-room, having one of his large ears cut open by half a brick. Mayrose dodged an old shoe which came straight to him through the window, upsetting a claret-jug on its way, and he pretended to follow Mary, but in the passage he turned and ran out to confront the mob.

As he opened the door a gust of impure air rushed in, and a couple of filthy citizens who had been kicking at the panels receded sheepishly. The rest of the crowd lapsed silent, staring, and preparing to harken. There it was, seething, dirty, clamorous, and yet prepared as usual to be cowed by firmness, that eternal *ignobile vulgus*—unsavoury mass of ignorance, imbecility, and greed which has become the Sovereign People of our day, and to which politicians, who profess to despise Courts, fawn with a sycophancy ten times more nauseous than the baseness of the most ardent palace flunkey. There it was—Universal Suffrage in its finest embodiment, as magnanimous now-a-days as when it banished Aristides because he was just—as discriminating as it voted for Barabbas instead of our Saviour.

Mayrose advanced, and might well have delivered Coriolanus's mild speech :—

"What would you have, you curs?
 . . . He that trusts you,
 Where he should find you lions finds you hares;
 Where foxes, geese; you are no surer, no,
 Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
 Or hailstone in the sun. Your virtue is
 To make him worthy whose offence subdues him,
 And curse that justice did it. Who deserves greatness
 Deserves your hate; and your affections are
 A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
 Which would increase his evil. He that depends
 Upon your favours swims with fins of lead,
 And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! Trust ye?
 With every minute you do change a mind,
 And call him noble that was now your hate,
 Him vile that was your garland."

He did not say that, but cried calmly, "What do you want?"
 "Down with the Ministry!" "Hooray for Paradyse!" "Shut up your potato trap!" were the cries that sprang up like fuses as King Mob regathered courage; and a distant citizen out of reach of reprisals caught up a handful of mud and flung it so dexterously that it flattened on Mayrose's black satin scarf. Delightful Sovereign People, whose jokes are blows from the fist, and whose epigrams lumps of dirt!

Mayrose wiped off the mud, with a careless smile, then began to speak, and so coolly that most of those in the front ranks held their peace. But he had not said many words before Mary darted through the door and encircled him with her arms, placing herself between her husband and the crowd. She had grown alarmed at not seeing him follow her, and had divined his danger. "Go away, men!" she cried indignantly at the multitude; "you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

Possibly they were ashamed of themselves for one minute; but their dispersal was not effected till Quilpin Leech intervened. Seeing Mary slip through his hands, the secretary perceived that the time for great resolutions had arrived, and scampering up stairs to a room where cotillion properties were kept, he clapped an ass's head in cardboard upon his pate, and descended proudly, four steps at a time. He was the image of Bottom, ever a darling of the people, and his appearance on the doorstep excited uproarious merriment.

"Now then, my brothers, he brayed, elbowing Mayrose and Mary unceremoniously aside; "just come along with me, who am one of you. You have been breaking windows like true working men; now is the time to claim your wages. We'll go and call on Mr. Paradyse for them. If he can't pay, we'll try the Bank of England."

Saying this, Leech dived fearlessly into the unclean surf, and surrendered himself to be pawed, hustled, patted on the back, and roared at. When last seen, he was heading the mob down Davies street, and his ass's head bobbed up and down like a float pushed rapidly forward by a foul current. It seems that he managed to escape in Brook-street by throwing his head among the populace, at all events he cleared the square, for none remained but half a dozen worthies, who, having distinguished themselves at the stone throwing, humbly begged that Mayrose would "remember them," saying that they had done their best to avert damage.

Not all the Ministers got off so easily as this, for one or two mansions were entirely wrecked. The window-smashing lasted two days, and at the end of this time the Right Hon. Ernest Paradyse, fearing that the Sovereign People might go to extremities, which would intoxicate them into claiming a more go-a-head leader than himself, issued an unctuous address, in which, while deprecating the unconstitutional action that was keeping him out of office, he besought his followers to evince that moderation which was the happy characteristic of all democratic communities. This, the police, a display of Life Guards, and a snow storm, which providentially supervened, ended by restoring order, and the Ministry resumed their labours without dread of being forcibly ejected from Downing Street.

Now, one of the Ministerial duties consists in passing an occasional week with

the Queen, as adviser in attendance on Her Majesty; and just as the glaziers had commenced putting new panes into his windows, Mayrose was summoned to go down to Windsor, a week before his turn, because Sir Tito Tumb had had his nose cut with a flint, and was obliged to wear sticking plaster thereon, which rendered him unfit for the Royal presence. The Queen's commands could not have come in a more unfortunate moment, for Mayrose felt sure that Grace Marvell would make some new effort to communicate with his wife. Mary's firm attitude, too, in face of the mob had greatly increased his alarm by showing him how determined the little woman could be when she pleased; and he was in fear that if once her suspicions were aroused, she would have no rest until she had discovered everything. However an order to attend at Windsor cannot be put off like an invitation to dine at Richmond; so Mayrose prepared to take his departure with Bino, and commended his domestic peace to Quilpin Leech.

"I leave you to keep watch in my absence, Leech," he said, as he was going, "I have a presentiment that the enemy will make a new move in my absence, and possibly one that neither of us suspect."

"Trust to me," said Leech. "I am a match for that poodle headed Italian."

CHAPTER VI.

IN ATTENDANCE AT WINDSOR.

To walk about the grounds of a Royal Castle in a blue swallow-tail coat with red collar and cuffs, to spend one's days in the observance of etiquette and one's evenings either in solitude or in respectful conversation with one's Sovereign about Switzerland and water colour painting—to do all this when one's soul is wrung with presentiments of ruin and sorrow, is a species of martyrdom not unlike that which the blessed St. Lawrence endured on his gridiron.

Mayrose had apartments in the Round Tower, and a notice, hung on the walls, commanded him in the Queen's name not to smoke. He breakfasted and lunched by himself at the hours he pleased, and ordered what he preferred out of a *menu* sent up to him in the morning by the Royal *chef*. His day costume was, as above said, that tasteful livery the Windsor uniform, with grey pantaloons, cravat, and gloves *ad libitum*; and in the evening he put on a dress coat, with breeches and black-silk stockings. A horse for riding and a brougham were placed at his disposal, but these commodities were not easy to use owing to the etiquette which forbids the Minister in attendance to absent himself for long from the castle. The functions of the Minister consist in the being always at hand to give constitutional advice when wanted.

There was the greater reason, too, why Mayrose should not absent himself much, as he found the Court in considerable commotion. Accustomed to see Ministries succeed each other in peaceful rotation without the stability of the throne being ever impaired, the Royal Family had come to look upon changes of administration as mere *chassez-croisez* in a quadrille; and they in fact preferred Liberal Cabinets to Conservative, for with a Tory Opposition they were secure from rowdy agitations. But this time ugly words had been uttered during the elections, and a number of uncompromising Republicans had been returned. The Grand Duke of Saxe-Kleinburg, who had been on a visit to Her Majesty, his relative, had declared that he was not without gloomy forebodings, and it had been remarked with consternation that even his favorite dish of sausages and mashed potatoes had lost all attractions for him—a significant symptom in so serene a Highness. Lady Chaffham, the lady-in-waiting, who was a cousin of Lady Beaujolais and a gushing person as full of song as a kettle, invited Mayrose to five o'clock tea in her rooms on the afternoon of his arrival, and at once gave him a general inkling of the situation.

"You see, the Queen has too much dignity to show uneasiness, but she has received letters of alarm and sympathy from Berlin and Coburg. Yesterday she sent me to the Librarian for the History of France. I offered to read it to her, but she thanked me and read by herself; and when she put down the book I saw that

the marker was at '1793.' All that is very dreadful. Do you really think we are going to have a Republic?"

"Anything but that," said Mayrose, calmly. "With their amazing conceit Englishmen have supposed for years that they could dabble with impunity in the democratic ditch, which has defiled other nations, and always caught fire in their hands. They are already learning that they are mistaken, and in a few years we shall have a Government closely resembling despotism. That is all."

"I am sure I hope so, and I wish you were Prime Minister, with a strong House of Lords at your back. But talking of Lords, we hear that everybody wants to become a Peer, and I expect the Queen will object. You know the one point of Government on which she has always had her way is the creation of peers; she will not hear of ennobling a poor man unless he be a bachelor."

"I doubt whether any poor names will be submitted to Her Majesty. I believe there will be no more than twelve new peers in all."

"Twelve? We had heard a hundred. By the by, is it true you have yourself refused an Earldom and the Garter?"

"The Garter was never offered me. I refused an Earldom."

"How could your wife have been so silly as to let you!" exclaimed her Ladyship, astonished. "Lady Beaujolais knows much better how to act for her husband. She will get him a Marquise before the Ministry go out, and she actually coaxed an old Judge into resigning, so that one of her relations might have the place. There's a sensible woman for you! I ought to tell you, though, that your delicacy is fully appreciated. The Queen heard with much concern of Sir Ham Pennywodle's ruin."

Mayrose gave a start.

"How can the Queen possibly have heard of a thing which I hardly yet know myself for certain, Lady Chaffham?"

"Oh, everything is known at Court, Lord Mayrose," replied the lady-in-waiting, with a laugh. "The Queen is naturally interested in hearing about the families of her Ministers, and she finds plenty of people to inform her."

"Yourself among the number?"

"Yes, I am especially active, and I can tell you I do my humble best to injure my enemies—who doesn't?" laughed her ladyship. "You, though, have no enemies at Court now. It was different before the split in the Cabinet, when there were numbers of Drones and Midges at Court. Then atrocious things used to be said about you; but luckily the Queen only believes half she hears."

"Half may be too much when the whole is untrue, Lady Chaffham."

"So it may," agreed the lady-in-waiting, cheerfully, as she set down her teacup. "I assure you, however, that Her Majesty has the best opinion of you. You will dine at the Royal table, of course, to-night, and you will find the Queen thoroughly gracious."

Mayrose dined at the Royal table, and did find his Sovereign as gracious as ever. No politics were talked, but the Grand Duke of Saxe-Kleinburg, who was still present, grimaced at the Minister with that peculiar mixture of aversion, haughtiness, and humility which is sported by all German princes in their relations with constitutional advisers. The next day a Council was held, and Mr. Paramount arrived at Windsor with his list of new peers, all of whom were on scrutiny approved, being patriotic men with from £30,000 to £100,000 a year apiece. After the Council Lady Beaujolais' relation, the new Judge, a learned man with a touch of lumbago, knelt on the carpet and was patted on the shoulder with a sword; and then ensued a little mild conversation about a new bishop and a new dean; Her Majesty ending by putting the intended dean into the bishopric, and the intended bishop nowhere, rather to Mr. Paramount's confusion. The day succeeding that was absorbed in signing patents for twenty new baronets, mostly from Manchester; but then came a lull, and time passed uneventfully till Sunday. In the course of the week Mayrose was commanded to dinner once more at the Royal table; but on the off days he dined alone, though had he chosen he might have joined the table—and a capital one it is—kept for the Lord-in-Waiting, the Groom-in-Waiting and the Equerry. These important officials, who have been known to assume a very

high and dry tene towards Ministers who were base commoners right honourablized by the will of the people, are always very friendly with proper peers; and he it said that they are gentlemen whose minds are valuable storehouses of information. If a man would require to know whether a knight's aunt takes precedence of an archdeacon's mother-in-law, he could not do better than appeal to their lights; and it was perhaps unfortunate for Mayrose that he happened not to be troubled by cares on these subjects.

Sunday arrived then, and in the morning the postman brought Mayrose his usual parcel of letters from town, among them being two which gave him great relief, the second much more than relief. The first was from Leech:—

"Dear Mayrose,—Everything has proceeded well so far. I send you all the letters that are left here, even those addressed to Lady Mayrose; and my lady has concurred very cheerfully in the arrangement, being persuaded that your object is to guard her against the importunate solicitations levelled at Ministers' wives. Lady Mayrose remains not at home to everybody, but yesterday she made an exception in favour of Lady Beaujolais and the new Lady Droneborough, whose magpie tongue I much feared; but the gods were good, and there were no mishaps. I continue as awake as a man with a thorn in his leg, and have not stirred out of doors since your departure.

"Your affectionate cousin,

Q. L."

The second letter was from Mary:—

"My Darling,—I have scarcely seen a soul since you left, and am glad of the precautions you took against my being worried, for the door-knocker has been rapping all the days and part of the evenings, and I do not know how I could have borne up against so many visits from people having favours to ask. Lady Beaujolais and Lady Droneborough called yesterday and chatted for an hour about the riots, and about my facing the mob, which, as you have no doubt seen, was put into the papers. They were both very good-natured in their excitement, but I found their conversation rather tiring, my darling, for I want to be alone with my happiness. Yes, happiness; can you guess what I mean? I wished to keep the secret to surprise you when you came home, but I have not the heart to rob you of an instant of the unutterable gladness. I feel myself in the hope of a child being born to us to make our union still closer. Can you understand now, darling, how I long for your return that you may join your prayers to mine, asking God that nothing may come to mar the promise of our happiness? My heart is very full, and I cannot see through the tears in my eyes as I sign myself

"Your devoted wife,

"MARY."

The tears were in Mayrose's eyes, too, as he raised this letter thankfully to his lips. Since he had begun to wean himself of his passion for Zellie, all the affections of his heart were being carried back to his wife—not yet, indeed, in the form of ardent love, but of increasing trustfulness and respect—and now that there was a hope of Mary's becoming a mother he must have been worthless, indeed, if all his impulses of tenderness and devotion had not flown towards her. His wife's note gave him fortitude to bear without wincing the four next letters which he unclosed, and which were of a very different sort. The first three were repetitions of the first denunciation that had been sent to Mary, and were directed in divers hands, one being wrapped up in a tradesman's circular. The fourth was a long and violent epistle of abuse from Sir Ham. The Knight hysterically reviled his son-in-law as being the cause of his ruin, and wound up by declaring that as Mayrose's immoral relations with Lady Azalea were known to him, he should advise his injured daughter to sue for a divorce. Mayrose was aware that Sir Ham in his present state could not have written this letter himself, and that it must have been dictated to him by Grace; so he resolved to leave it unnoticed.

He felt almost light-hearted, however, now for the first time since many days. In the morning he attended service in the private chapel, and in the afternoon, knowing that official advice would not be wanted of him on a Sunday, he walked through Windsor to Eton for the evening service in the chapel of his old school. It was a beautiful, mellow winter afternoon, and the sunlight glowed with something of autumn warmth on the crowds of comely boys trooping into service. This Sunday chanced to be the last one of the half year, and the joy of the boys at their coming holidays was visible on their young faces beaming in countless rows under the bril-

liant lights of the tall brazen chandeliers. Mayrose waited in the ante-chapel till his old tutor passed in his surplice among the college fellows, and then with thoughts of those former days which come back with such wondrous freshness to men jaded by the strife of the world, he went and took his seat in the stall beside his old master's. It was with more than common humility that the Minister then knelt again under the sacred vault, which had so often echoed with his voice in bygone years; and soon some verses of the evening Psalms sung by the choir and by the eight hundred young worshippers, fell with singular appropriateness on his ear.

"Hear my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my petition."

"The enemy crieth so, and the ungodly cometh on so fast: for they are minded to do me some mischief; so maliciously are they set against me."

"My heart is disquieted within me; and an horrible dread hath overwhelmed me."

The College Fellow noticed how reverently his old pupil bowed his head, and joined in the responses.

The verses were taken up alternately by one side of the chapel to the other, amid the pealing notes of the organ; and the music was plaintive, until came the final verses of the Psalm summoning the fearful and weary to the Eternal Source of Comfort:

"O cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee; and shall not suffer the righteous to fall for ever."

"And as for my enemies: O God, thou shalt bring them into the pit of destruction."

Mayrose walked back to Windsor through the clean Eton High-street solaced and reinvigorated. He had prayed that if it pleased Heaven to give him a son he might pass over to his child the heritage of a spotless name, and he clung to the faith that however dark might be the clouds around him now, the storm would pass over, leaving his reputation, if not his fortune, unscathed. He was much tempted for a moment to go and confess all his troubles to his wife, knowing, as he did, that she would implicitly believe every word he uttered; but he was withheld by remembering that the secret which he feared to see disclosed was Zellie's as much as his. It is a maxim, not of honour alone, but of common honesty and charity, that a man should never give up a woman's secret to another woman—not even to his wife. Mayrose could answer for himself; he could not answer that in some feminine quarrel between Mary and Zellie, or in some jealous hour when Mary might wish to guard the happiness which she might think threatened Zellie's secret would not be made hasty use of, to the poor girl's lasting shame. He had no business to run the risk. If the secret came into Mary's possession through other hands Mayrose might then give his true version of the story in self-exculpation; until then it was his business to remain silent, even though his silence would certainly be construed against him if his wife learned the secret from any lips but his own.

It was quite night when Mayrose reached the castle, so grey and grand in the gloom, and yet so living with its hundreds of lights. He was still composed and trustful, but it is to be noticed that when in the midst of troubles a sudden calm supervenes which makes one think that dangers may be averted—then is the moment when the storm breaks. Mayrose had no sooner crossed the threshold of the private entrance opposite the Norman Gateway than one of the scarlet footmen in attendance handed him a letter.

"One of your lordship's servants came up from London with this, my lord. He said it was very pressing, and knowing your lordship was gone to Eton, we told him he had better walk there. But he left the letter in case your lordship should be back before him."

"Mayrose turned away to break the seal, and he read this:—

"DEAR MAYROSE,—I am afraid misfortune has come. Lady Mayrose went out yesterday afternoon after giving her letter to you to be posted. She said she was going out shopping; but when she returned it was evident that something had happened. She was pale as death, and trembling. All this morning she has remained in her room, with the exception of half-an-hour, when she came down to your study. I met her as she was coming out, and saw that she had been crying. When I asked, however, whether she was

unwell, she said 'No,' very sadly, and in a manner which quite belied her words. Her maid has just told me that my lady has been crying all day and has refused to eat.

"Your affectionate and

"Sympathizing cousin,

"Q. L."

It needed but a request to the Queen through the Lord-in-Waiting, and Mayrose obtained leave to absent himself on the ground of his wife's sudden illness. A couple of hours later he was in town.

CHAPTER VII.

"ALL THY WAVES AND FLOODS HAVE GONE OVER ME."

Mary was seated on a low chair in her dressing-room, and she crouched over the fire. Her chin rested on her right hand, and with the left she plucked feverishly at her black silk dress. There was no light in the room but that of the fire, which threw flickering shadows on the ceiling, and Mary was so absorbed in her thoughts that when her husband entered she did not hear him. When, however, she saw him at her side she rose with an abrupt start, placing her hand on her heart as if a spasm had shot through it.

"I did not expect you back from Windsor to-day," she said, in a voice that trembled.

"I returned on hearing that you were ill. What has happened, Mary?"

He advanced to kiss her, but she receded.

"You have had me watched, then," she said coldly.

"Watched is not the word, dear. I left instructions with Leech to let me know if anything occurred to you."

"Letters, for instance—is it Mr. Leech who confiscates the letters addressed to me or is it your valet?"

Mayrose said nothing. The flicker of the fire had momentarily ceased, and left the room almost in darkness. He took a spill from the mantelpiece, and lit two wax candles that stood on the table, then glanced at his wife, who remained standing. She was wearing round her neck one of those small ruffs then in fashion and this gave her face an air like that of a woman in the sombre pictures of Spanish painters. Her hair was disordered, her eyes had red rims round them, and her features seemed doubly pale by the contrast. But her lips were set, and her expression was the same as he had observed on one or two former occasions—when she had rebuffed him with her coldness before marriage, and latterly when she had thrown her arms round him and defied the mob. Seeing that he did not answer her question, she repeated it imperiously.

"I have received some anonymous letters, dear," replied Mayrose, with a cough, "but they were full of untruths; that is why I kept them from you."

"Untruths! If they were so untrue as that, why need you have been afraid to show them to me?"

"Because there was some truth mixed up with the lies, and I could not have disproved what was false without revealing to you a secret which was not mine to part with. Tell me, however, what has happened, Mary, and I give you my word that you shall know all I felt bound to conceal."

"I know it already, for the secret you felt bound to keep from your wife has been disclosed to me by others," replied Mary, in a hard tone. "Yesterday I went out, and my carriage crossed my father's. He perceived me, and beckoned to the coachman to stop. I had not seen him for some time, and when he got into the brougham beside me and began to pour out a wretched story of complaints and accusations against me, I thought his mind was wandering. But some of his accusations were too palpable to be unheeded, and as I knew they would torture me if I did not become convinced of their utter falseness, I went to Kensington resolved to ascertain the truth. I traced Marvell had been in the carriage with my father, and she had returned to Kensington in advance of us. I saw her there with Lady Canon-laugh."

"Both your enemies, dear, and mine," interrupted Mayrose, nervously.

"Yes, and there was no pretence of friendship between us, believe me," continued Mary. "I asked Grace categorically what was the meaning of my father's words, and she answered me without reticence. Lady Canonlaugh corroborated all she said. And so it seems that I was the only woman in London who did not know that Lady Azalea Carol was your mistress!"

"Mary, I swear to you on my sacred honour that these two women have maligned me," exclaimed Mayrose, with intense earnestness.

"Oh don't, Frederick! leave me some illusions as to your honour," cried Mary, putting up her hand and waiving it to check him. "You have not heard the whole of my story; if you wished to avoid the possibility of detection, why did you keep Lady Azalea's letters, and why did you let your secretary wear a key of your desk on his watch-chain?"

"A key of my desk!" ejaculated Mayrose, and he suddenly remembered the gold key which he had given to Leech some months before, in view of his duel with Lord Hornette, and which Leech had kept ever since. He made the gesture of a man who knows he shall be judged on false appearances.

"Yes, the key of your desk," repeated Mary, fixing her eyes on him implacably. "When I returned from Kensington my brain was all on fire. To save appearances I of course told Grace that I did not believe a word she said, for it is the consequence of a husband's deception that his wife must steep herself in falsehood too if she is to guard him and herself from disgrace. But the while a host of circumstances occurred to me; Grace made no secret of her having sent anonymous letters to warn me, and you have concealed these! I remember your frequent absences tallying with all that was said about your meetings with Lady Azalea. Your secretary's attitude was mysterious, too; he spirited away all the letters that arrived; he looked ashamed when he spoke to me, and I recollect that about two months ago entering your study one day I had seen him hastily lock your desk as if he had stolen something there. What did all this mean? What right had Mr. Leech to share a confidence from which your wife was excluded? This morning I went and asked him whether he had a key of your desk, and he answered 'no,' though he was wearing on his chain as he spoke the gold key, which he knew belonged to you. It was not worth while exposing his duplicity, but I brought your desk up here and broke it open."

"You did an unwise thing, Mary," said Mayrose, sadly.

"I did what I could to ascertain the truth, which you would have hidden from me to your life's end had I appealed to you for it," rejoined Mary, whose voice rose and quickened. "And how could I have lived at peace with you, knowing there was a mystery between us? But you see now that I have discovered everything. I found twenty of Lady Azalea's letters in your desk, and a sealed packet which you seem to have addressed to her in prevision of your death, and in which you say that your last thoughts would be for her! What have I done to you, Frederick, to deserve this cruel outrage?"

Mayrose rested an elbow on the mantel-shelf and bowed his head on his hand. His demeanour was that of a man overwhelmed by the exposure of his crime. Mary watched him, frantically clasping her hands, and after a moment she spoke again, but this time her voice was full of agony, of entreaty, and of despair:—

"I ask you again, Frederick, what have I done to deserve this from you? Do you not think it is worse than death to me to see you cower before me—you whom I worshipped? Till yesterday the solitary grief of my married life was that before I became your wife I had for a period suspected you of the mercenariness imputed to you by others. This was a remorse which touched me whenever I looked into your eyes, which seemed to me so tender and true, or heard your voice, which sounded frank as the breath of heaven; and now I must learn that your conduct was all dissimulation! Had you no pity for what I should feel if I came to discover this? Did you think that my love for you was made up of the same pretence as yours for me? You must be a poor judge of woman's character if you did think so, but, if not, what heart could you have to risk making the whole of my life desolate? Was it for my money you married me? I doubt whether that money can have made

you happy. You were surely not happy when you lived every day in fear of detection and were obliged to connive with servants to deceive me; and are you happy now in hearing me say that our married life must end, and that if God gives us a child the first thing he will ask me when he comes to reason will be why his father and mother live apart!"

Mary's voice broke, and she sank down on a chair, wiping tears from her eyes. Mayrose felt relieved by her emotion. He greatly preferred this to the firm, cold tone she had adopted at first, and he took a seat by her side, but without endeavoring to touch her hand or give her any caress.

"Will you hear my justification, Mary?" he said, in a pleading voice.

"Yes; but let it be a true one," she sobbed. "Say anything that can make me forgive you. If you could only show me, Frederick, that your conduct was caused by any defects of mine—a misunderstanding between us; my ignorance or stupidity—God knows I should accept this explanation with humility and gratitude, and try to make amends for the future. But I shall not even pretend to believe your excuses if my own conscience does not ratify them. I tell you this at once; for it would be no use to begin a life which would end in a new calamity. One such sorrow as I have just suffered is enough."

What could he say to this appeal, which was so generous and yet so solemn? The explanation which would have been both safe and easy, and which would have made him seem so noble in her eyes had he come to her but a few days before and made it of his own accord, now appeared unreal to him even as he uttered it. He spoke, nevertheless, and spoke long, with all the beseeching force he could command; and she listened; but he saw that she did not believe him. The more convincing he sought to be, the more hollow did his utterances sound even to himself; and at the end of an hour Mary rose. She had dried her tears, and her voice had resumed its cold tone, with which, however, an inflection of weary grief and some contempt were mingled.

"That is enough, Frederick," she sighed. "I will not put your ingenuity to a longer test. I know that it is a proof of what men call honour to shield the women who are their mistresses, even though by so doing they break the hearts of their wives, whom they have sworn to cherish. I do not myself understand such subtleties. When I married a nobleman I really believed that your order cultivated sentiments above those of the class to which I belonged. I did not expect ever to hear my husband rack his mind for plausible inventions to cloak the shame of a girl of the nobility who had abandoned herself."

"What you are saying is cruelly unjust, Mary, and yet I cannot defend myself," exclaimed Mayrose, with despondency. "I must trust to time and Providence to justify every word of what I have said. Zellie Carol is as pure as yourself, my poor child, but I feel it would need a miracle to prove it."

"Nothing short of a miracle, certainly," replied Mary, bitterly; "but I do not want to seem unjust in my jealousy, so I ask you what would you say if our positions were reversed? What if I had married you for money and been detected by you paying clandestine visits to a former lover for the purpose of slowly curing him of his passion? The explanation would appear to you pretty preposterous, I think."

Mayrose made a gesture of assent.

"Well, so it does to me, Frederick, and the only difference between my judgment and what yours would be if you were judging me is that I think that impudent, immoral girl is more to blame than you. And now we must separate. I will ask you to make me a small allowance out of the fortune I brought you, and if any signatures are required from me so that you may enjoy the remainder in peace you shall have them. As to our—child—if it is a boy, you shall have him when he is seven years old; if it is a girl, you must let me keep her. In either case, you may trust me to bring up the child in respect of you, and in ignorance of what you have—made me suffer. Good-bye!"

The poor little thing faltered; a mist passed before her eyes, making her footsteps unsteady; and Mayrose was by her side in an instant, supporting her. He would have held her in his arms, and tried one of those silent supplications which, though mute, are more eloquent than any spoken sentences; but she quickly disen-

gaged herself, and fled into her own room, where she locked the door. She was wounded to the heart—both in her dignity as a wife and her pride as a woman—and Mayrose knew it as he stood gazing on the spot she had left with the blank expression of a child who has broken something.

He was looking at the pieces of the shattered honour. * * *

Mayrose did not return to Windsor on the following day. He wrote, begging a colleague kindly to undertake the duty, and about ten o'clock drove to New Square, Lincoln's Inn, to see Mr. Deedes. He was ushered in at once, though the solicitor had but just arrived, and had not unwrapped the cashmere comforter which enveloped his smooth chin. Running to the door to greet his client, Mr. Deedes extended both hands with a woebegone expression, and shook his head.

"I should have called on you by-and-bye, my lord, if you had not come yourself. But, dear me, how pale and ill your lordship is looking."

"I am not ill, thank God!" said Mayrose, subsiding into an arm-chair near the solicitor's glowing fire. "Troubled, that is all, Mr. Deedes. I want to know now about my father-in-law."

Mr. Deedes sat down at his writing table, put on his gold-rimmed spectacles, and unlocked a drawer, from which he drew a bundle of papers.

"The situation is very much worse than I feared, Lord Mayrose. I have been to Sir Ham Pennywoddle, and found him incapable of furnishing any explanations; this much, though, is certain, that bills to an enormous amount will fall due on the 26th, and that Miss Marvell, who holds Sir Ham's estates, will not pay a farthing of them."

"Then I will, that is all. You hold the stock of my wife's five hundred thousand pounds; it must be converted into money?"

"That is an heroic folly, my lord!" exclaimed Mr. Deedes with vivacity; "but let me dissuade you from it, as it would be useless. The swindlers who surround Sir Ham have raised money so recklessly, and so shamefully plundered him, that I doubt whether any sum less than three-quarters of a million could meet his claims."

"Then I must sell my own estate. Springfield, the town house, our family plate, jewels, pictures, and books ought to fetch three hundred thousand pounds at the least."

"Great heavens, Lord Mayrose!" cried Mr. Deedes, starting up in his chair as if a pistol had been fired. "You don't mean to say you contemplate so insane a project as selling your family estate? But you can't; there is an entail upon it!"

"The entail was cut off by my father and grandfather; you yourself drew up the instrument, Mr. Deedes."

"I did—I did, and it seems to have been the most foolish piece of work I ever performed; but I entreat you to reflect. I am an older man than yourself."

"Look here, Mr. Deedes; I have just had heavy troubles to bear, my nerves are all unstrung, and it is with difficulty I retain my composure," said Mayrose, interrupting him. "Please act like a friend, and do not pain me with remonstrances which would be quite thrown away. The honour of my wife's father is my honour. I have hopes that in a few months a child will be born us, and that child must inherit the name as stainless as it was left to me."

But Mr. Deedes was not to be put off in that fashion. He had his honour, too, which consisted in not letting his clients do grand things to beggar themselves. All the lore of the Courts of Equity came to his rescue—with precedents, too—how the Duke of This had left his father's debts unpaid, and had become a Lord Lieutenant, *custos rotularum et morum*, in spite of it, to the gratification of all loyal minds; how the Earl of That—but why record how nobly the Earl of That had bamboozled his creditors? Mayrose brought back the lawyer somewhat sternly to the fact that he was neither This nor That, and Mr. Deedes could only ejaculate in wonder and chagrin, "Well, you are your own master, my Lord."

"It is an agreed thing, then," said Mayrose, a little doggedly; "and now I will ask you to make out a settlement for my wife. When everything is paid there ought to be about £50,000 over, and I wish this sum to be absolutely settled on Lady Mayrose, so as to yield her two thousand a year, with reversion to her child."

You will have to consult my wife herself, Mr. Deedes, as to how she would like this sum paid her, for—I am sorry to say, we are going to live apart."

Mr. Deedes gave another fine start, but the first shock of the morning had been so great that his sensibility was blunted, and it was only in a vacant way that he murmured, "Apart! do you mean a separation *a mensa et thoro*?"

"Yes; I tell you of it at once, because the fact must have come to your ears before long. But I wish you to know that the blame of the separation rests entirely on me, and that my wife is entitled to the utmost regard at my hands."

"But, my lord, I beg you to consider that you are completely stripping yourself!" answered the lawyer, who felt altogether in a maze. "How are you going to live—you have not been long enough in office to claim a pension?"

"No, but I am young and can work; I daresay I shall get a foreign correspondence from some newspaper."

On these words, uttered without any of that maudlin tone of self-sacrifice which angles for sympathy, Mayrose prepared to take his leave, and Mr. Deedes having accompanied him to the door, hearkened to his footsteps dying away on the wooden staircase, and then lifted up his hands, exclaiming:—

"What next? And they say the nobility are degenerating!"

Yes, honest James Deedes, solicitor and gentleman, the nobility are degenerating when they seize your precious statutebook as a shield to protect them against their duties; they are degenerating when one hears them complain that the heroic ages are past when they could prove their might in battle. Battle! There are sterner combats fought every day between a man's interest and his honour than ever were in the fields where glory was to be earned by cleaving helmets. And it is in these unnoticed strifes where tears take the place of blood that must be carried the sword that never splinters, and the breast-plate untarnished—there that the soldier must bear stout heart and eye unquailing! But when the true knight has fought the good fight, and, putting on him "the whole armour of God," been victorious, then it is that he stands forth as a prince of the people, the guardian of an honour higher than that which the vulgar know. Then it is that his ermine is without spot—then it is that he is a representative of a chosen tribe like that of old which, from father to son, kept the Holy of Holies!

From New Square Mayrose went to the Africa Office, and transacted his business as usual. When his work was over he wrote to Zellie, giving her an account of what had passed between Mary and himself, but saying no word to wound her or to reproach her with having been the cause of his calamity. There was only one passage in the letter which could cause Zellie pang, and that was where he spoke of his hopes of an heir, and dwelt on the eternal claims which his wife would now have on his affection. He re-read this passage, for in the midst of his own heavy woes he was not careless as to what might happen to the poor child whom he had so patiently sought to cure. In this work he was resolved to persevere, befall what might; for its success would be his only reward for the suffering it had cost him. So he re-read the passage relating to Mary, doubting whether even this guarded confession of his love for his wife would not arouse Zellie's morbid jealousy; but, after reflection, he sealed the letter as it was, trusting to Heaven that it might operate the miracle he prayed for—that of opening Zellie's eyes to his true position and hers. The searing of a hot iron is not always harmful.

Quilpin Leech knocked at the door as Mayrose was sealing his letter. As his services were no longer of use in Berkeley Square, the new Permanent Secretary had that morning installed himself into his office and passed several hours in receiving instructions, very sourly imparted by his predecessor, Mr. Keane Rodent. Mayrose had not seen him the whole day, and held out his hand to him.

"You have come at the right moment, Leech—do me the last service of taking this letter to Lady Azalea. I will make new arrangements for the future."

"Has Lady Mayrose found out—everything?" asked the Secretary, putting the letter into his pocket with an air of sincere commiseration.

"Everything my enemies wished her to find out; and if you see Miss Marvell you can tell her she has repaid me with interest. She will understand what that means."

"I was afraid of trouble," answered Leech, with a sceptical wag of the head at the last observation. "When I came away this morning Lady Mayrose was packing to return to Springfield."

Mayrose ought to have been prepared for this announcement of Mary's departure; but on returning home and finding the house deserted, this visible proof of his separation from his wife brought him more sorrow than all he had borne before. Mary had left three bare lines, stating that she should remain at Springfield till the final plans she would make had obtained his approval.

With this note in his hand, Mayrose walked into his wife's boudoir, disordered by the activity of a hasty start. A dozen scattered things reminded him of the companion whose love and sweet worship had never failed him in former trials; and on a work-table he saw a baby's cap just begun and discontinued probably since the day when Mary had learned that the father of her coming child had never loved her. This little waif was not without its lesson and consolation to Mayrose, for it brought home to him how different the situation might have been had his relations with Zellie been as Mary suspected. Suffer as he might now, his disgrace came from without, not within, and he could hold his head high. The door of the boudoir was open, and the long drawing-room beyond was lighted up as if visitors were expected. Mayrose glanced in from the threshold, and his eyes fell on the portraits of his ancestors. They were standing motionless in their frames—so motionless that they seemed to be like an army saluting him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE LANTERN.

When a man surrenders a large fortune to pay some one else's debts so rare an act generally gets known and talked about. It leaked out that Mayrose was going to ruin himself for Sir Ham Pennywoddle's creditors, and people who wished him well thought him a fool for his pains. Among his enemies the statement was not believed. Ladies and gentlemen who had contracted the habit of abusing him found it simpler and sweeter to decide that some comedy was being played than to admit that they had been mistaken in their estimate of this peer. Hatred is a very luxuriant sentiment, yielding almost as much toothsome fruit as love. If it be cruelty to prove to a person that his or her affections have been bestowed on an unworthy object, how much unkindler it is to demonstrate that hatred has been lavished amiss! Happily the demonstration mostly fails. We knew of a lady who, having long cherished antipathy towards a man, was constrained to avow that her sole reason for disliking him was that he had two wives. "Why, he has never been married at all!" was our demurrer. "Ah, you may depend on it, then, it was not for want of the wishing," replied the lady, with refreshing vehemence; "it was only because he feared the consequences!"

Grace Marvell was informed of what Mayrose was about to do, but she believed it at once by instinct. Mr. Deedes, pursuant to his instructions, had begun by writing to her to obtain an exact list of Sir Ham's debts; and she had answered that the matter did not concern her. Mr. Deedes then wrote that he should wait on her to make a communication, and Grace, apprehending that this communication would consist in a request to give up the knight's estates to his creditors, retired to Penny with some thoughts of going abroad with Sir Ham till the latter's bankruptcy had been consummated, and all the unpleasantness of it had blown over. Mr. Deedes followed her, and in a short, cold interview, explained that he had not come for money, but to announce that Lord Mayrose would pay his father-in-law's debts to the last farthing. He added incidentally that Mayrose and his wife had separated, though wherefore he knew not.

Prince Casino arrived soon after this, and found Grace with a hectic flush on both cheeks, and sunk in a chair in a prostrate attitude of reflection. A very deep and disturbed reflection it must have been, for when the Italian advanced, his betrothed did not seem to recognize him, but stared at him with an averted light in her eyes, and recoiled timidly from his touch. He himself was full of rumours

which he had picked up in the City, and too much engrossed by his own plans to attach any significance to Grace's demeanour.

"Carina, let us not put off our marriage any longer," he began, taking her hand in spite of her, and raising it to his lips; "Sir Ham is ruined and crazy: where is the reason why we should derange ourselves on his account?"

"It's you? Have you heard what Lord Mayrose intends to do?" asked Grace abruptly, as if waking up, and withdrawing her hand.

"Yes; Robgroschen has told me he will pay Sir Ham's debts; and *tant mieux!* Do you not see, carina, how good a turn this lord does us by his Quixotry? If Sir Ham had been made bankrupt, people might have said that you and I, who had his estates, had plundered him; but since Milord pays, the world will think that he made profits out of the Loan, and is only generous because he can afford it?"

"They will be unable to say that, for Lord Mayrose sells his private estates, and will be left without a shilling," rejoined Grace, coldly; but what a disenchant-ed disdain there was in that coldness!

"He sells Springfield! Ah?" exclaimed the Prince, with amazement; then suddenly laughing, added in a cajoling way, "Why, my pretty Grace, do you remember telling me often how you admired Springfield Hall? Supposing we bought it? What if we spent our honeymoon under the roof of that Puritan *poseur*, who has treated us like the dust of his boots!"

Prince Casino plumed himself on being an honest man, as honesty goes in these times; but in speaking as above, he looked like a thimble-rigger. Grace fastened her eyes on him as though they would pierce him through, and there was little admiration in that gaze, as she asked slowly:

"Rubino, do you love me?"

"Love you! how can you speak so, my Grace? You are not love but life to me."

"Then, being rich now yourself, you would marry me if I had no fortune to bring you?"

"Why, of course, who would say the contrary?" rejoined the Prince, a little uneasily, like a man nearing unpleasant ground.

"Then what should you say if I had declined to be outdone in generosity by Lord Mayrose, our common enemy?" continued Grace. "What would you say if I had thrown my title-deeds into the fire?"

The Prince's face grimaced as though the jaws had got unhinged; and at a glance Grace divined that he would try to back out of the marriage if she really had burned her title deeds. She saw also that it was fear that formed the basis of his pretended affection for her, for he remained with his mouth open as if he hardly dared trust himself to answer.

"Why, why, carina, I should naturally marry you if you had nothing," he stammered at last.

"Thank you; but I shall not put you to the test," answered Grace with contempt. "I have not burned my title deeds, and do not mean to. Best hold to all the money we have, for money is everything, is it not, Prince?"

The Italian heaved a little sigh, half confusion, half relief; but seeing he had been drawn into a trap, he had wit enough to be anxious not to play a humiliated part in the eyes of his future wife. So, with an irresistible smile, and a show of exuberant gaiety, he answered:—

"Money is not everything, carina; but it is a great deal, and we need not talk of it like a melodrama. Why do I want to be rich?—because riches are the necessary surroundings to one of your divine beauty. Your small white hands were made to play with jewels, your rich hair will be the *surround* for *diadems* of diamonds. What! when we see millions of men grubbing for gold around us that they may stuff dry bread into their ugly mouths, shall I be ashamed of coveting wealth that I may gratify every whim of my adored bride? *Dio mio*, I am not ashamed! Myself, I could live on macaroni; but now I am rich and you are rich, why give up our money to an old man with one leg in his coffin, or to another who has tried to do us injury? Let Milord Mayrose throw away his money if he likes, nobody forces him and nobody will thank him. As for me, *per Bacco*, my

ancestors fought battles, but did they stop to cry over the blood they had spilled? *Chacun pour soi, et Dieu pour tous.* You will not see me weeping, my Grace, because you and I have won a battle in which gold has flowed from the veins of these fat English. But I will tell you what, carina, when heaven wished to create an animal uniting in his ridiculous person all the vices of other people without any of their graces, he moulded the Englishman, and flung him into the City of London, and into your foggy West-end. Your countrymen are hypocrites like Basilio and Tartuffe, my pet. I have done no worse than they do or try to do every day, but they will atone for their own failures and consciousness of roguery by proscribing me who am a foreigner! I have already seen that some of them view me as if I had two hoofs and a barbed tail; and that little Leech, whom I wish I had opposite my foil on Calais sands, per Dio!—he has talked of caning me; *maladetto*, let him attempt it! But why remain in England? Instead of buying Milord's heavy castle, let us sell all you have here, and live in Paris and Florence—two cities which mock themselves of hypocrisy, my Grace, and would treat you as a queen."

Print can not do justice to this valiant little outburst, which was delivered with gestures as good as a punchinello's. The rogue talked in French, but speaking that language like all Italians, with a conversion of *u's* into *ou's* and *j's* into *z's*, his accent was like the flutey warble of the magpie. Then his silky black moustaches were waxed out at either end like gimlets, his rosy cheeks and blue chin shone; he was wearing a short, tight-fitting overcoat of otter skin, which would have looked ridiculous on an Englishman, but which suited him to a nicety, as did his patent-leather boots, grey gloves, and silk handkerchief with a light blue hem perfumed with *ylang-ylang*. It was impossible for a girl not to be captivated by the air of seduction he diffused; a cold look chilled him, but he would come fawning back like a lapdog, and whine, caress, and frisk till he was restored to favour again. Grace was fain to set him down as an overgrown baby, whose cynicism came from innocence of heart, and who would all his life coax and fondle her as he was doing then. She could not be aware that Prince Casino had spoken to a thousand other women as he did to her. That he was at that moment deep in three other love affairs, and was expected at four that very day by a *prima donna* and at six by the pretty daughter of a retired cheese-monger at Clapham, to whom he had promised marriage. When he took her hand and toyed with her hair, when he chirped compliments about her beauty, and looked into her eyes with glances full of the effrontery of passion, Grace felt the Prince resume his ascendancy over her, so that she ended by smiling.

"Well, yes; let us go and live in Paris," she answered, recklessly; "after all, I have struggled for this, and have won; I dare say we shall be happy enough!"

"Happy! we shall be in heaven, *carina*! Ah, you have still too much English ice in your heart; our southern sky will melt it!"

"Your own love would have melted it long ago, Rubino, if you had felt real love for me," she replied, a little bitterly, but then added with concern: "What shall we do *though*, about Sir Ham? The announcement of our marriage will kill him."

"Bah! do you call the vegetable existence which that poor old man is leading, life?" ejaculated the Prince with a careless shrug; "let him take his chance, carina."

"I suppose it's best—yes; let us make an end of all *this*," replied Grace, with animation. "Call in Sir Ham yourself, Rubino, and speak to him before me—he has grown so unconscious that he may not understand; and in any case I mean him no harm; he shall live with us in comfort till his death."

The Prince's valour of a sudden fell again, for he did not like this delicate commission. However, as he had fallen into one trap he did not mean to slip into another; so, after running his fingers through his hair, he laid his hat and stick on a chair and went by the most roundabout way to the door in search of the Knight.

He discovered him in the rich study, full of costly books never read, of reviews never cut, and works of art any one of which would have been a treasure to a poor man with brains. He was poring over the *Times* City Article, and covering a sheet of foolscap with sprawling figures. There was no difficulty in making him abandon

his occupation with the intimation that Grace wanted to see him, and the Prince led him into the drawing-room by the arm, obediently as a calf. The old knight's lower jaw drooped, his mouth was distorted, and his left shoulder slanted lower than the other—an invariable symptom of the beginning of general paralysis.

"Miss Grace and I want to tell you something which I hope will make us all very happy," smirked the Prince, installing the old man very comfortably in a low arm-chair opposite the fire.

"Good'll come of it," answered Sir Ham, stolidly.

"Dear me, Sir Ham, what have you been doing with your fingers?" ejaculated Grace, stooping to wipe the old man's hands with her handkerchief as if he were a child.

"I've been going into figures," stuttered the knight, abandoning his hands unconsciously. "Twenty-five millions is what I ought to have at the Bank of England, and I'll get elected Governor of it; but they oughtn't to have raised the rate of discount; ill'll come of it."

"Twenty-five millions—*Ecco mi!* Yes, Sir Ham, but you were very near bankruptcy," giggled the Prince evidently relishing his task less and less. "If Miss Marvell had not so nobly paid your debts, where should we have been in our fine fix?"

"Hush! don't speak to him about that," interrupted Grace, quickly.

But the words were out, and perhaps the mention of bankruptcy—that knell to the ears of all traders—was the only thing capable of arousing the dying intellect of the old City knight. It seemed to ring in his empty head like a blasphemy under a church vault.

"We warn't ever bankrupt!" he growled, sitting up. "The Pennywoddles allus paid their twenty shillings in the pund! When we fust set up in bisness a bill fell due one day and my Jane she took her brooch and little Mike's silver mug to the pawnbroker's. Three pun' ten was what she raised on 'em—that was when we fust set up in bisness, and she'll tell you of it when she comes down."

"She is upstairs, then, Milady Pennywoddle," nervously lisped Prince Casino, catching at this straw. "You are fortunate to have so good a wife, Sir Ham, I myself think of marrying."

"Jane's been gone a weary while," proceeded the knight, unheeding him, and passing a hand over his own brow. "She fell down one night and looked at me with them soft eyes she had, and in the dark she puts her hand on my head when it do throb so."

"I want to tell you, Sir Ham—that is, to ask your consent to my marriage with Miss Marvell," insinuated the Prince, pouring out his request in one draught at what he considered a propitious juncture.

The knight stopped short and glanced at Grace, who was standing to the right of him, the Prince being seated to the left. He made a movement to rise, but the chair was too low, and he sank back. "I didn't hear what you said, sir!" he remarked, vacantly, as if he had received a blow, but had already forgotten who dealt it.

The Prince, increasing in his tremor, repeated his request, and then Grace, arming herself with the courage which her lover lacked, endeavoured to make the explanation clearer. All the while Sir Ham sat motionless, with his eyes rolling in distress from one speaker to the other. It was impossible to detect whether any ray of understanding pierced the opaque clouds round his mind; and as his silence became disquieting, Grace and the Prince stopped with a common accord and considered him. Suddenly a flood of purple blood, almost black, flowed to the knight's brow and ears, and he sprang up, stretching both arms convulsively before him:

"Grace! Grace! they've all deserted me!" he gasped, as if choking. "Jane, my boy Mike, and my little Mary—they've all gone, and ill'll come of it! I tell you she's looked at me in the dark, whisperin' things I couldn't hear, because my head throbbed as if it was a splittin'!"

"Sir Ham, for Heaven's sake, compose yourself!" interposed Grace, in alarm lest the servants should be attracted; but the raving knight was not to be checked; he tottered towards Grace, and caught hold of her dress with such force that he

tore it, though it was ribbed silk ; then as Grace made a step backwards he frantically twined his arms round her, and continued to shout hoarsely :—

"You won't leave me, you're my wife, Grace, and they're all gone but you—you promised when my Jane went, but I didn't murder her for that—she knows it, and tells me so in the night, laying her hand on my head when it throbs and splits. It was falling down the stairs that it happened—one evenin'—and they brought her into the room where all the servants was—a-lookin' at her soft eyes wide open. I doan't know what's the matter wi' me—there's my head a splittin' agin. Jane ! Jane ! tell Mike and little Mary to come down to me."

Grace, now fairly frightened, sought to disengage herself, and the Prince, assisting her, tugged at Sir Ham from behind. But here the scene became ghastly. The knight uttered a series of cries that were like howls, and hugged Grace with a strength quadrupled by his paroxysm. In the struggle Grace's foot caught in her dress and in a hassock, and she fell backwards over a sofa, while the Prince rushing distractedly to her rescue, struck the knight wildly on the arms to make him loosen his hold. Few blows were needed, however. The poor old man's embrace relaxed as soon as he had fallen. With a gurgling in the throat he rolled over, his face congested with blood, his eyeballs glazed and startling, and his mouth covered with a red foam.

"Quick, unfasten his necktie ; it's an attack of apoplexy !" cried Grace, rising with her hair fallen, her dress torn, and her hands scratched ; and she tugged violently at the bell.

Servants hurried up, and Sir Ham was borne senseless to his room, a stable-boy starting off to fetch the nearest doctor. When this medical man arrived, he shook his head and pronounced that Sir Ham had received a stroke from which he was not likely to recover. The rest of the afternoon was spent in watching him as he lay breathing insensibly on the bed, and Grace, unaware that Lady Mayrose was at Springfield, wrote a telegram to her in London. The Prince undertook to have it despatched, and left the house, glad to be quit of such emotional scenes. His was not a nature to court the neighbourhood of suffering, and death he shunned as a creditor. His parting words to Grace were that he should procure a wedding license on the very morrow, in order that they might be married without further delay, and leave this gloomy land of fog and troubles.

Grace assented. She was unnerved, too, and clung, as women will in such a crisis, to the first man who offers them protection.

"Yes, Rubino ; we must be married quickly," she faltered. "If Sir Ham dies, I shall have nothing to linger for."

No, Grace Marvell would have nothing to linger for.

Sir Ham dead, she would be free, and, as she said, she had struggled for this and won.

Won what ?

Conscience is a little dark lantern which solitude sets alight in the night ; and very clear are the rays which it throws upon our struggles and winnings.

Grace being alone, the lantern lit up, and steadily it burned. First, its gleam fell pale as an altar candle on the memory of Lady Pennywoddle, her benefactress—dead ; upon the dying form of Sir Ham, who had loved her, ruined himself, and lost his reason for her ; upon Mary, who had been her kindest friend, and whose heart she had tried to break ; upon Mayrose, who had striven to serve her, and whom she had struck wifeless, roofless, and penniless ! These were her struggles—and now for the winnings. Steadier and steadier burned the little lantern ; but what a mocking flame it was that showed at first—nothing ; then some piles of money, among which was thrown Prince Casino's lustreless coronet !

But where was the pure love without which a woman's life is nothing—where friendship, the respect of others, the prospect of dignity and happiness as a wife and mother ? She had struggled for these, too, for she was a woman with a heart, who would have loved to cast herself at the feet of any man she could have worshipped. And there was such a one whom she had in her vengeance plotted to humble, and who had not been humbled—whom she had persecuted, and who had come purified out of the fiery furnace which her hatred—if it was hatred—had lighted. How

serenely and nobly his image shone upon her, and how that of the foreigner who was to be her husband quailed before it. Yet she had loved, or thought she had loved, this undignified jackanapes who had played upon her with his flatteries. It had been a love born of vanity, pique, sensuousness, and perhaps the want of something better. But no; for she could have married honest Quilpin Leech, and risen to a position of respect and affluence as his wife, and she could have grown to love him. When, however, she thought of Leech, Grace asked herself whether she regretted having rejected him for her present prospects, and she answered emphatically, "No!" Alter all, she was such as Heaven had made her, and where was the use of gloomy musings? Millions of women would envy her present state. It was no despicable thing to have a husband whom she could turn with her little finger—to be rich and titled, and to see countries before her where her beauty would kindle round her a continuous incense! So she tried to quench the flame of that importunate little lantern.

But it had not yet done burning. If conscience throws so searching a glare upon past events, it has rays which pierce dimly even into the future. Grace could not help following one of these rays, and saw something dark and undefinable which she had left out of all her former calculations.

Then she grew afraid.

Was it the shadowy form of retribution she saw? To some the fear of this eternal avenger comes through religious beliefs, remaining from childhood; to others through superstition; in either case it is a very, very old experience which shows that the sins of evil-doers do at some time or other, and in mysterious ways, find them out. Some one knocked at the door, and Grace was startled, but it was the butler who had come to ask her whether she would dine or take tea?

Then it occurred to Grace that she was alone in the house with servants. Lady Canonlaugh had been called back to her husband's estate for a few days by Christmas duties; the doctor was gone, leaving Sir Ham to be tended by his valet; and the Prince was not to return that night. What if the servants should murder her for her jewels! This fear was a first delight of her newly-gotten wealth, and Grace examined the face of the butler when he came in with the tea, fancying that he eyed her in a different way than usual. But it was fancy, for that respectable servant had a twenty years' character at his back, and was a pattern of all proprieties. Grace would have liked to call down her maid to sit with her, but was afraid that the girl would notice her disturbed condition, besides worrying her with lamentations about Sir Ham.

The evening was now creeping on. All the shutters were closed except those of a glass door which looked from the drawing-room on to a conservatory. Grace rose after tea, and gazed through this door, trying to see into the garden beyond the flower-house; but she could see nothing, for it was a cloudy night. She could only hear the wind whistling through the trees in the park and the rain, which had begun to fall, and was pattering upon the conservatory's glass roof.

She returned shivering towards the fire, and placed a foot on the fender. Not a sound to be heard saving that fall of rain and the occasional dropping of a coal into the grate. She took up a book, and made an attempt to read, but her eyes wandered away. Surely the little lantern had begun to burn again—and what was it that made it now shed such a light of such strange and fearful distinctness? The undefinable shadows which it had conjured up were no longer shadows; they had transformed themselves into the apprehension of something tangible—aye, of an immediately impending danger. That danger was approaching her—now it was close at hand—now assuredly it was bursting on her.

"Who is there!" cried Grace, abruptly starting up, blanched of all colour.

The door of the conservatory had opened, and a wild, dishevelled figure was staring into the drawing-room, his face flattened against the glass.

"Help! help! help!" screamed Grace, her heart seeming to freeze as she turned to fly.

The glass of the door burst inwards with a tremendous crash, an arm was protruded through the jagged aperture and wrenched round the key in the lock. The door flew open.

CHAPTER IX.

COALS OF FIRE.

At about the time when Sir Ham Pennywoddle was falling down senseless there was a commotion in Dr. Rogur's asylum for the mentally afflicted, owing to the disappearance of Mr. Marvell.

The dinner-bell had rung summoning the mentally afflicted to eat third-quality beef half-sodden, but Mr. Marvell did not answer the call. His keeper, Gurdles, ran out into the garden and shouted for him under his window by the name of "Mr. Job," it being the custom in these asylums to strip patients of their family names, along with their valuables and offensive weapons. If Gurdles had not been under obligations to Mr. Marvell's friend, Mr. Leech, for frequent tips, he would have shouted simply "Job," for brevity is the soul of wit.

"Mr. Jo-ob! your dinner's a gettin' co-old!" bawled Gurdles; then, as no answer came, he soliloquised, "Where the dooce can the old idiot have got to?"

Gurdles felt alarmed, because peccant. Since Mr. Marvell had begun to proffer horrible menaces against the persons whom he supposed to have conspired against him, orders had been given that he should not be left alone an instant. But at meal-times all the hands in the asylum were generally required to carry in the dishes, and Mr. Marvell would have had time to hide himself in the quarter of an hour between the first dinner-bell and the second. Now it was well known to Dr. Rogur that all his patients were left unwatched while meals were being served—it was known to him because, for reasons of lucre, he always kept a staff of attendants less numerous than was required; but Gurdles had cognizance enough of this world's ways to guess that if anything went wrong it would be he and not Dr. Rogur who would bear the blame. This is why he felt alarmed.

The ward in which Mr. Marvell was confined was connected on one side with Dr. Rogur's private house, and on the other with the offices, linen-rooms, and kitchens. A wall on the right of the windows parted the ward-yard from Dr. Rogur's private garden, and one on the left divided it from the kitchen-court, which opened on to a public road, and which was frequented all day by tradesmen's boys coming with goods. At the end of the ward-yard was a tall gate, leading to the other wards and gardens, more or less big according to the special maladies of the patients caged there, and according also to the price they paid. All the walls were such as an agile patient could have easily climbed over by the help of a couple of chairs, the branches of the overhanging trees, and a quarter of an hour's time, with dusk to shelter him; but Mr. Marvell was not agile, and this was broad daylight. So Gurdles came to the conclusion that either the door leading into the kitchen-court had by some inadvertence been left open, and that Mr. Job had slipped through it, or that Mr. Job had suddenly fallen down in a fit. He preferred the latter hypothesis to the former, and was about to satisfy himself as to his correctness by darting up to the patient's room, when he was struck by a reverberation of red light flashing on the panes of one of the room windows which was closed, and by a cloud of smoke issuing from the other which was open.

"By Jingo! the old idiot has set fire to hisself; yet I'd locked his fire-grating tight enough!" muttered Gurdles, with a curse, his last remark having reference to the iron net-work screening the hearths of all lunatics to prevent them meddling with their own fires.

Gurdles made a dart up the staircase, but half-way the smoke began to choke him. He struggled on valiantly, however, and reached the patient's door; but no sooner had he opened it than a great tongue of flame licked him in the face, and drove him back yelping, with all his lungs—

"Fire! the 'ouse is afire!"

At the cry the dining-room was emptied in an instant of patients and keepers, the latter incredulous, the former wonder-stricken or grinning, according to their moods, and all chewing thir tough beef. Dr. Rogur, who seldom favoured his afflicted friends with a visit, seemed to have divined by instinct that something was amiss, for the door leading out of his garden opened, an anxious face was

protuded, and the Doctor, taking in the situation at a glance, cried, with wrath and terror commingled—

"It's Gurdles who is responsible for this! Why, Mr. Job must be burning; save him somebody, and put out the fire."

"Taint me as is responsible," grumbled Mr. Gurdles, sulkily, with his knuckles in his eyes; "the fire a'most blinded me."

"But put it out, put it out!" repeated Dr. Rogur, half blinded and choked himself now by the columns of smoke rolling out one upon the other. "Mr. Job is in there, I suppose; save him, some one, at any risk."

Dr. Rogur naturally meant "at any risk to yourselves," for he made no offer to imperil himself, and his anxiety on Mr. Marvell's account proceeded solely from the fact that the combustion of this patient would entail on him a loss of £300 a year. However, a keeper—one of those modest heroes who are to be found among all classes of Englishmen where there is a danger to be faced and no thanks to receive—vanished, and soon came hurrying back across the garden trailing a ladder with one hand and holding a hatchet in the other. He planted the ladder against the open window, nimbly scaled it, knocked away in half a dozen blows the wire grating before the window, and sprang into the flaming room.

He remained invisible a few instants, and then returned, excitedly coughing rather than crying—"Mr. Job ain't here, and the room 'ave been set fire to a'purpose! The matrasses 'ave all been piled up and are blazing!"

Less than a minute had the keeper been in the room, but his hair, eyebrows, and beard were all scorched away; and when he slid down the ladder his clothes came off him in cinders. If there could be any doubt as to the intentional causes of the fire it was soon dispelled by the flames bursting out suddenly at another extremity of the building. Meanwhile, the door which Gurdles had left open having promoted a draught, the fire could be heard roaring like a furnace, while wood-work began to crackle and window-panes burst with the intensity of the heat.

"Put all the patients into Ward Three!" screamed Dr. Rogur, beside himself.

But this order passed unheeded in the growing confusion. Many of the keepers wanted to save the trunks that contained their clothes and savings, and rushed away in all directions, leaving gates open behind them. A strong east wind that was blowing beat down the smoke upon the gardens, enshrouding them in a thick fog, through which could be heard doors unlocked and banging, maniacs howling with fright or delight, while others, competent to take care of themselves, made for the nearest egress, frantic at this unexpected chance of recovering their liberty. Amid so much smoke, and with an undisciplined staff of attendants, it was impossible to exercise any restraint on the patients. Most of them surged through the kitchen courtyard, where scullery maids and cooks were already scudding away with their aprons over their heads; and Dr. Rogur himself, fearing he should be stifled if he remained in the smoke, decamped to effect the rescue of his portable property, and to despatch the first willing servant to the nearest fire-station.

Now, when the smoke had become so thick as to be impenetrable, and when the flames had begun to leap through all the windows of the burning house in huge red forks, Mr. Job Marvell, who had been lying under a sofa in the day-room of his ward, stole out on all fours, and groped his way to the gate through which the rest had fled or were flying. Hastening keepers and patients passed him, indistinct as shadows; somebody tripped up over him, and roared with fright. He, the while, pushed forward stealthily and steadily till he reached the kitchen-yard. Another few steps, and he was in the road, whence by plunging through a hedge-gap he attained a field; and there he began to run till he came to a plot of rising ground, from which he could gaze on his work.

The flames, fanned by the wind, were rising now, and formed a waving crest of fire above the house. Millions of sparks flew upwards from rafters in full blaze; smoke, now blue, now grey, streamed from crevices in the roofs like whiffs of steam, or rolled away up and down in curling gusts. People were flocking along the roads from all parts, and from the windows of Dr. Rogur's portion of the house, matrasses, linen, and breakable furniture, even to clocks, were being cast out in the usual panic of salvage. All this while runaway patients, with their hearts in their

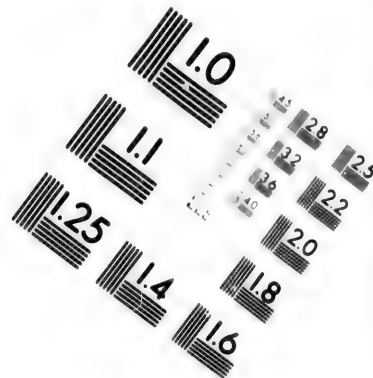
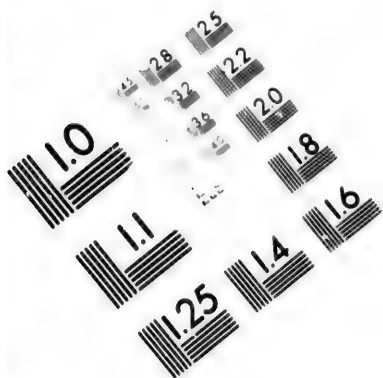
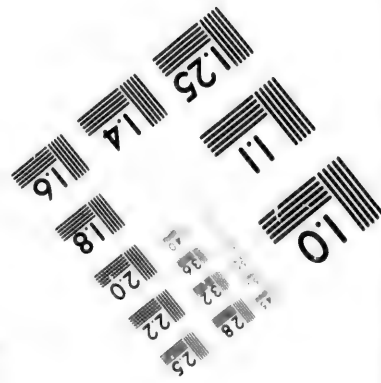
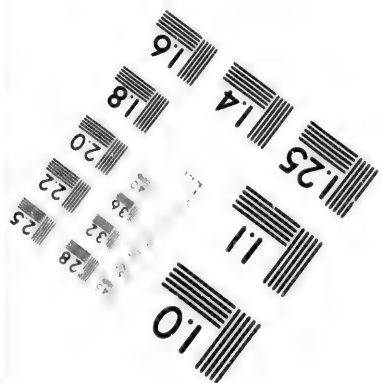
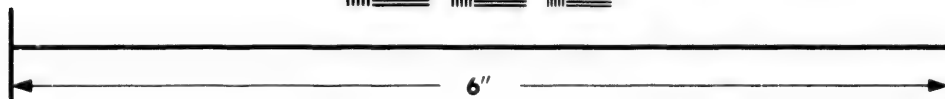
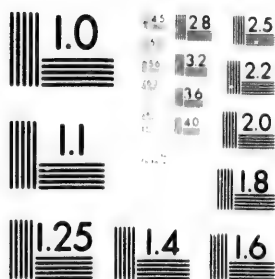
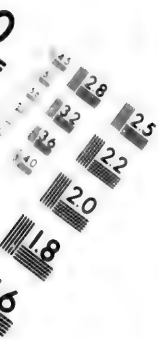


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heels, hatless, and in many instances tattered, were scampering away across fields as fast as they could go.

Mr. Marvell raised a yelling laugh of exultation, and when the roof at length fell in with an astounding crash, followed by an upheaved column of black smoke, and a rain of stones, ashes, and charred splinters, he shook both his fists and danced; then turned, and laughing still, as at the best of jokes, set his face towards London.

Dr. Rogur's asylum was destined to be gutted. The nearest fire engine was five miles distant, and when it arrived water was wanting, according to wont, and the firemen could only look on silently, while the local vestrymen were abusing one another like tramps because each wished to lay the blame of the failing water on his neighbour. Soon after the engines, a squad of mounted police galloped up, and the sergeant, addressing Dr. Rogur, who was wringing his hands, and mounting guard in a meadow over a stack of drawing-room chairs and sofas, a piano, a bedstead, an assortment of copper saucepans, a strong box, an oil portrait of himself, and a dozen ledgers which he had been enabled to save, asked him for explanations.

"How did this happen, doctor?"

"It was one of my patients did it," whined Dr. Rogur, who was truthful because he knew that any equivocation might be used against him by the insurance offices.

"And is your patient in custody, sir?"

"No; he has escaped, I fear," said Dr. Rogur. Then recollecting Mr. Marvell's threats against Mayrose, Miss Marvell, and Mr. Keane-Midge, this friend of the mentally afflicted beckoned the sergeant aside, and whispered to him for five minutes. "He is a very murderous lunatic—a case of homicidal dementia—and I dare say he will make an attempt to murder his daughter and Lord Mayrose. He says the two are——" (Here some more whispering.)

"Do you mean Lord Mayrose the Minister?" inquired the sergeant, likewise with bated breath.

"Yes; and I think his lordship should be warned. Such lunatics are most treacherous and reckless."

It needed no more to set the sergeant flying. He spurred away for London, and an hour later dashed reeking into Scotland Yard. Very shortly afterwards the Chief Commissioner himself darted across Whitehall. The task of warning Mayrose was too delicate to be entrusted to a subordinate.

It was nearly six o'clock, the lamps in the streets were lighted, and office hours were over. Most of the clerks had long gone home, but the blue-coated porter in the hall apprised the Chief Commissioner that Lord Mayrose was still within. The fact was, despatches had been received that day from African Governors, and Mayrose, contrary to the usual practice of principal secretaries, made a point of reading and annotating all despatches himself, instead of entrusting this task to clerks. He was sitting with a cup of strong tea at his elbow, geographical charts under his eyes (to make the despatches intelligible), and at least three long hours' work before him, when the police official entered.

The Chief Commissioner at once explained the situation, and trod lightly over the delicate part of his message. "This Mr. Marvell is a very dangerous character to be at large. He is haunted by ideas of revenge."

"Yes; I know him, poor fellow. He has been maddened by injustice."

"But it is necessary you should be on your guard, for he labours under the delusion that his daughter is living under your lordship's protection."

The Chief Commissioner said "delusion" from necessary politeness, but a police-chief has so much experience of the by-paths of this life that he is never sceptical as to scandals; and this one, though an admirer of Mayrose, believed all that his sergeant had whispered to him.

"Well, I see nothing for it but to set detectives near Miss Marvell's residence, Mr. Keane-Midge's, and mine," said Mayrose.

"That shall of course be done at once, and the railway stations will be watched."

"I will give you Miss Marvell's address, but I am not sure whether she is in town," proceeded Mayrose, taking up a pen. "Mr. Leech, the Permanent-Secretary, might have helped you in warning Miss Marvell, but he has gone to Hampstead to dine with some friends."

Mayrose did not realize the presence of any danger to himself, but of a sudden he remembered that Mary was alone at Springfield. The escaped lunatic, if he did not find his daughter in town, might go down to Penny, and thence to Springfield; and though it was not likely that he would reach Mary, he might occasion her some fright, which would be dangerous in her present condition. It was necessary that Mayrose should shortly go down to Springfield to regulate affairs connected with its sale, and also to see Zellie, who had written almost imperiously, to beg that he would come to see her. Under these new circumstances, he reflected that he might as well go down to Springfield that night. Quilpin Leech was not in the way, having been invited to attend a family celebration of all the Hampstead and Fulham Leeches, over his recent appointment. If he had been at hand, Mayrose might have asked him to go and warn the Springfield servants; but as it was, he could discharge the mission himself, and without intruding on Mary. He would go and order the lodge-porter to admit no one into the Springfield grounds without examination, and would then return and sleep at the "Crown" at Hiveborough. This plan having rapidly shaped itself in his mind, he said to the Commissioner—

"I think I will go down to Springfield myself to-night, Colonel, and take measures to protect my wife from possible annoyance. There is a train starts at six, but I am too late for it; I shall be able to catch the 7:05."

"I think you will do prudently, my lord," answered the Chief Commissioner, who naturally attributed Mayrose's determination to a desire to escape from the chance of a town *fracas* with a lunatic, which would make the newspapers talk. "It is best, I think, to keep out of London until we have caught the man, and this cannot be long, for it is probable that he has no money. Meanwhile, we shall take every precaution." And needless to say the Chief Commissioner was as good as his word. With the surprising celerity always displayed in shielding important people from injury, telegrams were sent to every police-station in London, notifying that an escaped lunatic was at large with murderous designs against a Minister. A pair of detectives were sent to Sir Ham's house at Kensington; another pair ensconced themselves in Mayrose's kitchen; a fifth even disturbed Quilpin Leech over his dinner at Hampstead, and brought him back to town in a flurry, and others were told off to every railway station, underground and overground. Fully forty detectives were out that night looking for Dr. Rogur's patient. Unfortunately they were too late, for by the time enquiries were instituted at Kensington the lunatic had already been there and gone. Finding his daughter was out of town, he had repaired to Berkeley Square, and either by mistake or by the caution of Bino, disliking his looks, had been told that Mayrose was absent too. When the detectives came to watch for him at the railway station, he was long gone to Hiveborough, for he possessed some money, which his constant visitor, Leech, had innocently given him.

Mayrose did not finish reading his despatches. To the great relief of the hall-porter, who had chafed at being kept on duty while the Minister read letters from African persons, he took away the more important despatches to peruse on the train, and set off for the station without going home, but sending a messenger to Bino to order him to follow to Hiveborough with a dressing-bag. All this while he knew nothing of Sir Ham's attack. Grace's despatch had been addressed to Lady Mayrose, but since Mary had reproached him with confiscating her letters, Mayrose had directed that all communications for his wife should be remitted to her, so that the telegram had been put up in the usual evening parcel for Springfield. Mayrose reached the station in good time, and travelled to Hiveborough without other incident than the company of a facetious bagman, who prevented him from glancing at his despatches. The line was one which had tried the agreeable experiment of abolishing second-class, and the bagman recognizing Mayrose through public portraits undertook to draw him out on the politics of the day. An American politician might have put such an interlocutor easily back into his place; but the

quiet courtesy of an English nobleman had no more play on this bagman than ether on the back of a tortoise, and Mayrose was fain to conclude the interview by pocketing a prospectus in which superfine clothes at thirty shillings the suit were offered on the three years' system of payment.

At Hiveborough it occurred to Mayrose to wonder whether the Chief Commissioner had sent a telegram to warn the country police of Mr. Marvell's escape, and he asked for the station-master to inquire of him. The station-master had heard of no such telegram. Mayrose then asked whether any one answering to the description of Mr. Marvell had been seen at Hiveborough. "Yes," replied the station-master, "a white-headed, wild-looking gentleman had come from London an hour before. He was the only passenger by the six train, and he had questioned a porter about the way to Penny on foot." This seemed conclusive, and for the first time now Mayrose began to feel and fear danger.

Yet he ought to have experienced relief, for the danger was diverted from Mary's way, and was on the track of the woman who had been his relentless enemy. But Mayrose was too brave not to shiver at the thought of an unknown peril dogging even his worst foe—especially as that foe was a woman. At the consciousness that Grace Marvell's life might be threatened, Mayrose instantly forgot that she had ever injured him. His resentment was put aside like a sword in its sheath.

There was but one fly at the station, and it was wanted for a fat lady with some luggage; so Mayrose hastened into Hiveborough on foot, and made for the police station. It was a windy, sloppy night, with clouds overhead, and a drizzle of cold rain; and the town wore that heaven-forsaken look of small provincial boroughs after night-fall. The rows of gas-jets burned with dull redness; the shops were mostly closed; not a dog was in the streets, but here and there some tattered, debased shadow of womanhood hung at a corner near a public-house, from which the sounds of a concertina and coarse singing streamed untunefully. It was down a by-street that shone the blue glass lamp of the police-station; and Mayrose, rushing in all wet, for he had no umbrella, found two policemen.

Mayrose rapidly intimated on what errand he had come, and asked whether a couple of policemen could be dispatched at once to Penny. The two men, astonished at such a visit, were standing upright and respectful, and listened with all their ears. One, who was just off duty, volunteered to start, and said he would find a mate in a few minutes. He also remarked that he thought the lunatic could not have had more than half an hour's start.

"My lord, I fancy it must have been that party who asked me not three-quarters of an hour ago the road to Penny. I told him and saw him a minute afterwards go into Cuttles', the ironmonger's."

"If that be the case a man on horseback might overtake him before he reached the park. I think the best way will be that you and I should go together. Can you ride?"

"Yes, my lord, I served in the 9th Lancers."

"I will go to the 'Crown,' then, and get a couple of horses saddled; meantime, would you run to the ironmonger's, please, and find out what the man did there? It will be as well to bring your handcuffs."

The policeman promptly strapped on his cape again; he and Mayrose parted at the door, running in opposite directions, and soon the man arrived breathless and somewhat scared to say that the "party" had purchased at the ironmonger's a large clasp knife for five shillings. These suspicious tidings were brought into the stable-yard of the "Crown," where Mayrose and a lumpish ostler were saddling two screw hunters by the light of a lantern with a tallow dip in it. The news of the peer's presence speedily drew out the landlord, who lent a hand, and also some of the local quidnuncs who made of the "Crown's" tap-room their habitual evening resort—the postmaster, a bank-clerk, a bachelor corn-chandler; but these persons having heard of Sir Ham's precarious condition, attributed Mayrose's arrival to family motives. The coming of the policeman, however, set conjecture afoot, and it was in the midst of whisperings that Mayrose and his companion sprang into their saddles and set off down the High street at full gallop.

What a night for a gallop! So long as they were in the town it was well

enough, but along the country road, where no lamps and few houses were, it was dark as pitch. Country cows, too, and donkeys, have a knack of straying out of fields and lying down in the middle of roads; and Mayrose, who rode a little in advance, was obliged to hold over his horse's head the lantern which the policeman had prudently brought. The downpour of rain was continuous. The water, blown slantwise by the wind, lashed into Mayrose's eyes, soaked his clothes, and caused a drip like that of a roof gutter to fall from the brim of his hat over his face. On both sides of the way the wind soughed through the trees, making them noisily toss their branches aloft, and scatter twigs along the road, every foot of which was chequered with puddles that splashed flakes of slush on to the legs of the horses and their riders. Nevertheless, the pursuers urged on their beasts with voice and heel, and soon reached the lodge.

The people at the lodge were up expecting the doctor and other visitors through the night to see Sir Ham; and the keeper, on being questioned, informed Mayrose that a stranger with white hair had passed the gates ten minutes before. This took a load of anxiety off Mayrose's mind. Ten minutes was not a long start, and it was improbable that the lunatic would have time to do any mischief before the hue and cry was raised after him; so slackening his pace as he breasted the avenue, Mayrose said to the policeman—

"When we reach the hall go in, please, and say that a lunatic is prowling about the grounds. Have all the servants out, and remain with them yourself. I myself will ride back to Hiveborough to have more assistance sent you; but you need not mention at the hall that I rode with you."

"Very well, my lord," answered the policeman; but almost instantaneously he shouted, "Halloa!"

The cry was evoked by the figure of a man which darted suddenly across the road before the horses' heads, and rushed away over the turf to the right.

Mayrose turned the lantern, and quickly detected the figure to be Mr. Marvell's; but he checked the impulse of the policeman, who had wheeled his horse, and was for riding down the fugitive. The Penny estate was laid out in ornamental walks, shrubberies, and hollows; there were statues about, and a croquet ground, where hoops were fixed permanently—all of which things would be so many ambushes to a horse. Much better, said Mayrose, ride straight to the house. Now that the lunatic's whereabouts was known half the danger of his presence was averted.

This would have been good reasoning if the riders could have pushed on to the hall without hindrance. Unfortunately, the road was being mended half way; barriers were set up, and the horsemen had to strike across a tract of turf, the path over which was marked for carriages by ropes and lanterns. This lost them five minutes. When they got into the avenue again they were close to the house, but the lunatic, who had taken the shortest cut, had drawn ahead of them. Though they could not see him, they heard him kicking violently at the door of the conservatory, the lock of which soon flew off and gave him admittance. Mayrose, who knew that the conservatory communicated directly with the drawing-room, through the one unshuttered window of which a light could be seen, hurriedly expressed his alarm to the policeman; and it was then that this brave but obtuse guardian of the peace wrought evil by doing a rash thing. Thinking he could attain the conservatory quicker by branching off the road, he turned his bridle before Mayrose could stop him, and darted off at racing pace in the direction of the light. But before he had cleared twenty yards in the dark his horse ran full tilt at a marble statue, recoiled with a stifled neigh at the shock, then fell like a lump, dashing the policeman twenty paces to the front, senseless, and with collar-bone smashed. Mayrose heard his companion's groan, but he had no time to rescue him. Spurring onward, he reigned in at the conservatory just as the lunatic had broken the glass of the second door and had bounded into the drawing-room.

Grace had risen, and was screaming frantically for succour.

At the sight of her father, armed and glaring, all her blood seemed to curdle. For a moment she stood stock still, then made a maddened dart towards the door leading into the hall. But the lunatic forestalled her. With the diabolical cunning of insanity, he flew to the door too, turned the key in the lock, and thrust it in his

pocket. But by this movement Grace was temporarily saved; for when her father, shrieking ecstatically over his stratagem, turned round upon her with knife uplifted, he was confronted by Mayrose, who had burst into the room, leaping over a sofa, and stood with a chair uplifted, protecting Grace.

It was a palpitating scene. Grace, more terrified by the sight of her succourer than by that of her mad father, had shrunk as at an apparition, and gazed at Mayrose as if she could not believe her eyes. Mayrose himself had not said a word. He had thrown off his hat, and holding up the chair as a buttress kept his clear gaze fixed on the lunatic. In the first shock of surprise, the lunatic's arm dropped; but it was only for a moment. With a gush of blood flying up to his face, and a rabid gleam in his eyes, he yelled:—

"You, her paramour! Then I've got you both together! See, the jade is cowering at your danger more than at hers! Look at the love in her eyes! She's been like that since she first saw you. But I'll kill you first, and so make her die a double death; and any jury'll acquit me! Now see to yourself you smooth-faced hypocrite!" with which deadly menace the lunatic sprang forward, with his knife in air.

Now, Mayrose's part was a difficult one. Any ordinary foe he could have felled and disposed of; but the delicate instincts of a manly spirit were ever present to guide or thwart him, and he had now to remember that this murderous lunatic was the father of the girl whom he had come to save, and that he could do him no harm in her sight. Under the circumstances the contest was not equal. The knife in descending buried itself in the bottom of the chair, and Mayrose gave the chair a rapid wrench to whip the knife out of the maniac's hands, then closed with him, and bore him to the floor on his knees, he on the top, and weighing on the maniac's back with his chest. But Mr. Marvell had not loosed his hold of the knife, and hissing disjointed imprecations, he drew it across both his assailant's hands, causing a long stream of blood to trickle over his own head and on to the carpet. Then Mayrose, feeling his hands useless, cried despairingly to Grace:—

"Call for help, please. I think I can manage him; but don't come back to this scene yourself?"

These words, however, falling like coals of fire on Grace's head, only drew from her a sort of guttural sob. Heaven only knows what she had endured during the brief struggle in which her safety was being wrestled for by the one man on earth from whom she could least claim protection, but on seeing Mayrose's blood she threw herself on to her knees, as if crazed herself, and clenching her hands, covered with jewelled rings, struck her father with frenzied force on the knuckles. They were no puny blows she dealt, and the lunatic uttered appalling howls of fury. Meantime the door was being battered at by horrified servants trying in vain to effect entrance. At last, under the pain of the blows, Mr. Marvel let go the knife, but gathering all his strength at the same instant, he shook off Mayrose, leaped to his legs, and made a dash at the poker.

Then Mayrose rapidly saw that he had to prevent the horrible thing of a father murdering his daughter, or being killed by her. Grace had risen as fast as Mr. Marvell, clutching the knife in her hand, and placing herself in front of Mayrose so as to shield him. Mayrose attempted to lift a chair, but his bleeding hands refused their office; perceiving, however, the lunatic advanced on Grace with the poker, he sprang between them, raising his arms, and received a terrific blow on the elbow. Before he could raise the other arm a second blow, that whistled in its descent, crashed full on his head, and knocked him lifeless near the fender. Then Grace, who had been unable to prevent this, so quickly had it been acted, raised a cry as if all the chords of her heart had been rent, and plunged with the rage of a tigress on her father. But with a back-handed blow of the poker handle between the eyes the lunatic caused her to stagger; and with another blow, struck at the side of her head and on her face, with all his infuriated might, he stretched her beside her suspected lover.

CHAPTER X.

"WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME . . ."

A week before Christmas London is generally full of people passing through town to buy presents or pay bills before dispersing again to visit friends; and at this time the clubs are as crowded of an afternoon as in June.

One evening Lord Hornette entered the Brummel alone. He walked into the reading-room and took his stand pensively before the fire. It was sherry-and-bitters hour, and there were plenty of members present, some of whom rose to accost the Earl. Lord Hornette, however, put up his hand to request silence, and it became evident he was going to speak. This is what he said, with a slight preliminary cough—

"There are probably some members in this room who heard me six months ago when I used Lord Mayrose. I wish now to retract what I said then. If an entire misapprehension of facts can be an excuse for the animosity with which I spoke, I am anxious to atone, now that circumstances have made me aware how unjust were my aspersions. There is not a man in England whom I respect more than Lord Mayrose, and I wish he were present to hear me say so."

A chivalrous reparation, Lord Hornette! though a little tardy, for at that moment Mayrose's life was trembling in the balance, and it was doubtful whether he would survive the night.

Mayrose, Grace Marvell, and Sir Ham were to all semblance dying under the same roof; and the "Tragedy at Penny Hall" was filling the papers with daily columns of details and conjectures. There were not wanting those who scented therein a most palatable scandal. A nobleman, married, and Minister of an unpopular Government, slain by the outraged father of a girl with whom he had an illicit connection!—what a text for glossings in Club smoking-rooms, and for endless gossip over the tea-tables of suburban villas! Mr. Marvell had been arrested, and on being brought before a magistrate had made a rabid denunciation of Mayrose, Grace, and Mr. Keane-Midge; and the latter gentleman, who had been the primary instrument in crazing Mr. Marvell, of course had now come off unscathed, whilst a high-minded Minister paid for his little officialities. Mr. Keane-Midge remembered what things Mayrose had sought to do unto him, and discharged the grudge of the gnat against the bee. He said unctuously that he felt bound to declare "in the interests of justice" that there had certainly been suspicious relations between Lord Mayrose and Miss Marvell. Mr. Marvell was undoubtedly mad, and had always been so; indeed, his dismissal from place had been due to his eccentricities, so that Mr. Keane-Midge could only attribute Lord Mayrose's advocacy of this wretched man's case to an interest—"a pure interest," he believed—in the young lady.

But an article in the *Reporter* shed on the matter its proper light. Mr. Dexter who had a long score against Grace, but felt gratefully towards Mayrose, instituted enquiries with Leech, Mr. Deedes, Prince Casino, and others, and the result was a long narrative true in its main points. Thus can the most carefully guarded secrets of men's lives be thrown as a pasture to vulgar tongues. The public learned every private particular about Grace and Sir Ham, the Loan, the hostility of Grace towards Mayrose, her appropriation of the old knight's estates, and Mayrose's noble sacrifice of his private fortune to maintain his father-in-law's integrity. Nothing was kept back but what concerned Lady Azalea Carol, and the effect of these disclosures was that in the eyes of all who were not wilfully blind Mayrose became stamped from that day as a hero.

But the existence of the hero was flickering more and more feebly, and his wife who nursed him, wondered whether he would ever again recover consciousness to hear her say all that was on her heart, to bless him and crave his forgiveness for having a moment misjudged him. What need had she of proofs now to believe her husband innocent of all she had imputed to him? Sitting by his bedside, she had, in the midst of her harrowing grief, shed tears of joy and pride over his unconscious hand on learning the story of his magnanimous self-impoverishment, and his

knightly surrender of his life for the woman who had brought him to beggary. Then she recalled how he had sought to justify himself before her when she accused him, and the resigned look—not reproachful, but manly and sad—which he had cast her when she refused to believe his words. Quilpin Leech helped to complete her remorse. He could speak now without fear of being thought to be in connivance with his cousin, and the tale he related of Mayrose's efforts to save Zellie was one well calculated to touch the heart of a woman—a tale of devotion as generous as it was rare, as beautiful as it was true. Besides, Mary was now well disposed to absolve and sympathise with Zellie, whose only offence was to have loved with fidelity a man whom Mary above all others knew to be so loveable.

So the poor repentant little wife watched and prayed while Sir David Wilson, the most eminent physician in London, wrestled with the grim death who was seeking to widow her. The danger was too grave for any of those useless consultations wherein three doctors, professionally rival, hold colloquies only to disagree. Against death one whole mind is stronger than three divided ones, especially such a mind as Sir David's. He brought to bear all the tenacity of a Scotchman with the keen force of his science, and inch by inch fought with the Eternal Enemy. At last came the moment when human skill can do no more, and when the issues must all be left with the Divine Healer. Mayrose fell into a deep sleep, and it was known that he would either pass away quietly in it, or awake to a new birth.

But, meanwhile, what of Zellie Carol?

If the crushing of a flower brings out all its perfume, the wringing of a heart will often draw out its purest qualities. Struck with horror at the news of Mayrose's tragic adventure, Zellie's pangs were intensified by her ignorance as to the true circumstances of the event. She had not seen Mayrose for some days, and now her tortuous-minded, garrulous maid came bursting with ignoble tattle to tell her that Mayrose had been murdered through the fault of "a young lady with whom he kept company." Zellie would have been no woman had not a mordant jealousy temporarily seized her; but fortunately she was simple concerning evil, and could but half understand all that her maid would have had her know. What little she could understand, too, she soon rejected as incredible and impious.

But it was then that she began to feel how ambiguous was her position, through not daring to show openly her anguish about Mayrose's fate. Had she remained with the friend of her childhood on the same terms as of old, how unaffectedly she would have betrayed her grief, how she would have relieved her heart by talking of the sad event to her mother, to everybody! As it was, her dawning consciousness of guiltiness made her fear to be suspected; and while Lady Rosemary, in woful distress, was despatching servants to Penny Hall with messages of condolence and requests for news, Zellie affected an impassiveness which surprised and almost shocked her mother.

But inwardly Zellie was consumed by torturing fire, and she sent off her maid to bid Quilpin Leech come to her. Leech, whose every hour was now occupied between night attendance in the sick-rooms and day work in the State Department, all the labour of which had fallen on to his hands, came nevertheless, though he was determined that in this interview he would speak to Zellie in a way she would remember to her life's end. He chose a Sunday for his visit, and Zellie, who had been apprised beforehand of his coming, took a pretext for not going to the village church with her mother, and stole out with her maid into the park to meet him. It was a fine frosty morning, and the last notes of the church bells were pealing clearly through the winter air as Zellie took her stand near the familiar belvedere, and saw Leech come through the trees. Her feet burned with impatience as he advanced towards her walking—she would have had him run—and at length she hastened forward herself to encounter him half-way.

"What has happened, Mr. Leech?" she said, shaking hands with him, and quivering in every limb.

Leech was very sad; his manner was cold too, and he paused some moments before giving an answer. Then he related the melancholy story, but long before he had ended Zellie burst into tears.

"Oh, dear, dear, what can I do?" she cried. "It is misery to be so helpless!"

"You can do nothing—you have done too much already, Lady Azalea," answered Leech, gravely. "I have not finished yet, for I must add that before Mayrose was struck down he and his wife had parted because Lady Mayrose suspected you of being his mistress!"

"Mr. Leech!" exclaimed Zellie, all her patrician blood flushing to her brow with shame and revolt.

"Why should I conceal the truth from you?" replied Leech. "Mayrose wrote to you the other day explaining what had occurred, but he was too generous to tell you what you had made him suffer."

"It is most unmanly of you to speak like that, for you well know I am innocent," sobbed Zellie.

"I know it; but how would others have believed it, Lady Azalea? You had nearly wrecked Mayrose's happiness, and that at a time when his wife had become dear above all other women to him, from the hope that she was going to bear him a child."

"Oh, don't, Mr. Leech! Don't you see what misery you are causing me?" panted Zellie, placing her hands on her breast.

"I am not seeking to speak cruelly, for your love excuses you," rejoined Leech, gently; "but now let what I am going to say console you, and inspire you with a resolution worthy of your love: Mayrose's heart was once wholly yours, and his tender affection for you is still infinite, though it is one that neither you nor he need be ashamed of."

Zellie cried silently, but her tears were less bitter now, for these last words were balm to her.

"He loves you as any woman might be proud to be loved," continued Leech; "but now he has duties towards his wife; and just as he would have been the truest of husbands to you had you married him, so will he be true to her. By claiming anything more of him than what a man can openly give to a woman who is not his wife you will only be causing him sorrow and trouble, and storing up days of heavy remorse for yourself."

"But what am I to do?" wailed Zellie, in the most abject distress.

"Make atonement. Mayrose risked life-long misery and disgrace for you; requite this by making a sacrifice to his peace henceforth," answered Leech, beseechingly; "if he recovers, let him learn that you have confessed everything to Lady Rosemary, and asked forgiveness of his wife—who will grant it you but too gladly, poor little thing, for she knows the truth now."

"Confess to my mother! Oh! men never know what they say when they speak to women!" murmured Zellie, with a forlorn gesture.

"I am recommending a sacrifice, I know, but you stand deep in Mayrose's debt."

"Nobody feels it more than I do—but you would not speak in such terms if you knew what love was."

"I know it indeed, Lady Azalea; and that is why I can sympathize with you," said Leech, a little bitterly. "Miss Marvell, who lies at death's door, is not less dear to me than you were to Mayrose, and I should esteem no sacrifice of my own happiness too heavy to procure her an hour's joy."

This little touch of fellow-feeling in grief wrought more on Zellie than the rest. She glanced up through her tears, and saw how pale and care-worn Leech was looking.

"I am so sorry. I didn't know," she faltered. "I hope Miss Marvell is better?"

"I can only pray and trust," said Leech whose voice had just the faintest quaver in it.

"And—and do you think Lord Mayrose will recover?"

"Yes, by Heaven's grace, I cannot think that his career is spent," answered Leech, composed again. "But here let me repeat my entreaties to Lady Azalea; not only confess everything to your mother, but remember that there is no purer return you could make to the man you have loved than that of showing him that his brotherly care of you has left you with a heart strengthened to accept such

duties as your young life may still reserve for you. The last load of anxiety would be removed from his mind if he could see you the happy wife of a good man."

"Happy wife!" echoed Zellie, with a moan; "I would lay down my life to save him—but do you think I can forget him in a day?"

"Not in a day, but in course of time. To offer your life is nothing; we do that for those who are indifferent to us; he has just proved it."

"I would endure pain, shame, untold misery for his sake."

"Then why not endure happiness? He could have no pleasure in seeing you miserable; but give him the gladness of seeing that your young beauty, grace, and goodness are not to be wasted by what would be a moral suicide; let him look with pride upon his young sister revived by his fostering care to a life of new hopes and joys! See, Lady Azalea, the man in whose name I plead may be dead as I speak, and perhaps his kindly spirit is hovering over us—in gratitude and reverence to him promise me you will try."

Zellie hung her head. Her heart-wrung tears had burst out afresh at the mention of Mayrose's possible death, and she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes whilst her breast was convulsed by sobs. Leech had uncovered himself in pronouncing Mayrose's name, and stood before her bare-headed whilst he waited for her answer. When he saw that no reply came he repeated his question in a lower tone and his voice had in it all the manly, protecting earnestness of a proven friend's.

"Lady Azalea, will you try?"

Still no answer.

"Perhaps God will grant us a miracle," said Leech, mournfully, "for He has promised that He would not despise the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. If by vowing to do what I asked, Lady Azalea, you could restore Mayrose to health, would you do it? Weigh your answer before it is recorded as a vow."

"Oh, yes," faltered Zellie; and saying this she threw her brimming eyes instinctively upwards, and clasped her hands.

"Then God bless you!" said Leech; "and may He in His mercy hear you, give you fortitude, and remove all thorns from your path"—muttering which words he turned and left her.

Now what passed between Zellie and her mother after this? We do not presume to reveal the secret, nor to conjecture with what tears and humiliation, with what self-reproach and appeals for solace, Zellie poured out her confession. Enough that she did confess, and came through the ordeal with that new fortitude which Leech had wished her in his blessing. It was some three days later that a long letter, signed by mother and daughter, was brought to Mary; and then another day elapsed before Mary's reply arrived, saying simply, "Come."

The Countess and Zellie went together to Penny Hall on a mild winter afternoon. It was on the day when Mayrose had fallen into his deep sleep, and his slumber had already lasted twelve hours when the carriage from Elmwood reached the hall.

The names of the visitors were brought to Mary in the sick-room, where she had been sitting almost uninterruptedly since midnight, watching every sigh of her husband's breathing. She went down at once to the drawing-room, and mother and daughter both rose when she entered—so touching, yet so brave, with her little wan face, black dress, and forgiving eyes.

Without a word she walked to Zellie and kissed her, then, as if this were not enough, she took her hands and pressed them, while Zellie hung on her neck.

Then, with an attempt to smile, she embraced the countess.

"My darling child, my daughter has something to say to you," whispered the countess tearfully. "I will leave you alone."

"Yes, dear Lady Rosemary, let Azalea come with me," said Mary, and taking Zellie's hand like a sister's she led her out.

With noiseless steps and bated breath, up a staircase and past two other chambers where death was lurking, and then Mary opened a door and signed to Zellie to enter.

The room had been partially darkened, but the afternoon sunlight streaming

through the blind threw a pale clearness on the bed where Mayrose was lying, still asleep.

Zellie approached the bed and fell on her knees; Mary sank beside her, and there they kneeled and prayed till at the supplications of these two women the Angel of Death went away.

CHAPTER XI.

ATONEMENT.

At about the time when Mayrose awoke, Grace Marvell began to revive. The ripe fruit falls easily from the tree; the green must be torn off. Grace's constitution was strong, she was in the plenitude of youth, and she had shared with Mayrose the care of the great physician and the anxious tending of Mary. All the three sick rooms at Penny Hall were, indeed, occupying Mary turn about; and if she lingered longest in her husband's, she had never suffered two hours to pass without going to superintend the professional nurses who were watching her father and Grace. The worthy little woman did not know how to give Christian pardon in chary doles; she heaped it up in handfuls—good measure, pressed down and running over.

So consciousness returned to Grace, then dim memory, then the knowledge that her beauty was gone, and that she would remain permanently disfigured.

The preoccupation on this last point is generally the first that assails a woman who recovers from wounds or fever; and personal charms play so great a part in the destinies of women that none can blame them for their concern, which does not proceed from mere vanity. But Grace's first thought was not for herself. As soon as she could summon back the brief, dreadful drama in which she had been struck down, she enquired in a faint, timid voice about Mayrose; and when the physician had told her all that was good for her then to know, she turned away, and wept tears which assuredly blotted out her past life to the very last line.

The next questions, after a day or two's almost silent interval, were about Prince Casino; but she did not appear much astonished or grieved to hear that this noble character had flitted. The chance of regaining his freedom was one that he had not been able to withstand; the more so as the newspaper exposure of his share in the Loan had led to depressing talk about expelling him from the Brummel, and in various other ways had made our foggy metropolis too torrid to hold him. We may take leave here of this captivating foreigner by saying that he removed to Paris, and might have settled in that unprejudiced city had he not been routed out thereof by the father of the young lady at Clapham to whom he had promised marriage. Scared away like a gadfly off a daisy by this unpleasant parent, he took wing to his own land, and may be there now for all we know, giving of his substance to adorn votive Madonnas, after the example of his eminent countryman Fra Diavolo.

Prince Casino thus lost to her, Grace asked after Sir Ham, and learned that his life still compassed him like a shadow which might vanish at any moment. Then she bethought her of her own prospects, and one day, after a long night of sleep which had given her strength, she crawled out of bed when her nurse's back was turned and unhooked a hand mirror. One glance into it was enough. She guessed that the long deep scar which indented one side of her face would mark her to her grave, and that all chance of her being wooed again for her beauty was at an end. She did not sigh much. One would have thought that the recollection of the wealth she possessed made her careless of this disaster, but for some days she was absorbed, and it was evident that there was a question trembling on her lips, which she desired to ask, without knowing of whom to ask it.

This question was whether Springfield had been sold, and she was enabled at length to ask it of Quilpin Leech.

She had begun to mend rapidly then. Christmas was past, and on an afternoon when she was strong enough to walk from one room to another her maid arrayed her in an ample white cashmere peignoir; and wrapped a black lace mantilla round her

head and face in such wise that her scar was partially concealed. Then Grace went and lay on a sofa in her dressing-room, having the light behind her, and sent a message to Leech, who stood beside her a few minutes afterwards.

There was no sign on his quaint, earnest face, that he thought her a whit less beautiful than before, or that ought of the many things he must have heard against her had made her seem less pure in his sight. All the world might rise to shake a love like his without moving it an inch. She saw this before he had opened his lips—by the mere look of ineffable tenderness, respect, and compassion he bent on her, and by the emotion which prevented his saying a word—until in low, repentant tones, and with tears, she began to accuse herself to him. Then he stopped her:—

"Springfield is not sold," he said, quietly, as though he had heard nothing else she said. "It takes time to dispose of such an estate as that, and Mr. Deedes raised money on it temporarily to pay Sir Ham's debts."

"They are all paid?" asked Grace, trying with her wasted hand to dry her eyes.

"All paid," answered Leech.

"Then Springfield must not be sold, Mr. Leech. Here is the key of the bureau in my boudoir downstairs . . . You will find some papers there tied with some pink tape. I want them burned, and . . . would you go to Lord Mayrose and say that . . ."

" . . . Those who imagined Sir Ham had made you his heiress were mistaken—yes, dear Grace," said Leech, gently interrupting her as he bent over her hand to take the key.

He went out of the room without appearing to notice that she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and was sobbing. He descended to the boudoir and burned a batch of parchment deeds without glancing at the writing outside them; but also without taking his eyes off the fire until the flames had consumed the last trace of them.

Then he went to see Mayrose.

It was not altogether without misgiving that he went; for though he himself attributed all Grace's errors to the influence of Prince Casino, he was aware that in other eyes Grace must seem to have had the chief hand in Mayrose's ruin; and he was too fond of his cousin not to feel deeply for that ruin, which was total and crushing. In the first ardour of sacrifice, a man may be blinded to the magnitude of the things which he surrenders; but when after reflection comes, and a life begun in fortune and promise must be re-commenced with no certain prospect ahead, a man, though he may not regret his sacrifice, is yet apt to feel bitterly towards those who made it necessary. Leech knew this, and he feared to find Mayrose disposed to give Grace only such forgiveness as comes of pity and disdain—not that cordial pardon which clothes Repentance anew in hope and self-respect.

But he need not have feared, for Mayrose was in that soft languor of convalescence, when the future, however cheerless, seems bright. Returning, too, from a voyage to the confines of the other world, the soul looks with indifference on the petty wrongs of this life. It is something to have stood on the brink of eternity. If the glimpse had been only that of an instant, the mind must ever afterwards be fixed on the dimly perceived vision, and a chastened indulgence accrues to all who are our fellow-wayfarers in this earthly pilgrimage, which lasts so little and ends in a life so long.

So Leech went to rejoin his cousin, and it so happened that on that day Mayrose, like Grace, had felt strong enough to move into his sitting-room. Propped up by pillows, and with his shaven head still bandaged, he sat opposite a warm fire, and Mary had sorted on the table near him all the letters of inquiry and condolence received during his illness. Telegrams from the Queen, daily notes from Mr. Paramount and other Ministers, frequent cards from Lord Hornette, and countless epistles from people, many of whom were unknown to him, and some whom he had thought inimical. There were eulogistic newspaper articles too, verses from well-meaning and anonymous poets (one had gone the length of contributing an epitaph in the belief of a fatal climax), and a voluminous correspondence from divers of those charitable souls who, whenever any personage of distinction falls ill, write up

from all the far-off nooks in the kingdom to prescribe specifics. Sitting on a stool at her husband's feet, Mary read such extracts from these letters as she thought likely to interest him, and it was thus that incidentally she came to open a note from Mr. Deedes. Then Mayrose suddenly asked the question which had been engrossing Grace Marvell:—

"What steps have been taken to sell Springfield, Mary?"

"Oh, Frederick, dearest, do not let us talk about that now!" said Mary, dropping the note, and nestling her head on her husband's lap. "By-and-bye, when you are stronger, I shall tell you all I have felt since that day when—"

"We can both forget that day, darling," interrupted Mayrose, gently; "and I am strong enough to talk about these things. Is the old place gone?"

"No, no, dear; not yet."

"Well, I asked without regret," said Mayrose. He stroked his wife's hair a moment; then stooped over her and whispered:—"I was glad when that wretched money went, Mary; it stood between us. You brought me an inexhaustible fortune in that little heart of yours; but who knows how long I should have taken to discover my treasure if Providence had not worked in its own ways to enlighten us both? We shall start afresh now, hand in hand, dear, and without a cloud between us, eh? Look up, and tell me that no painful thought of the past shall sadden you in our new honeymoon."

"I am more happy than I deserve, Frederick," murmured Mary, as she buried her face in her husband's hands, feeling perhaps for the first time then that she and her husband were now indeed wedded in those bonds which not even death can break.

A knock at the door roused Mary from her recumbent attitude, and broke the reverie of emotion into which Mayrose had glided. It was Leech who entered.

"Welcome," said Mayrose, with an affectionate smile. "You are not *de trop* at this family council, for I was about to confer with Mary as to what I should do with my time when I was up and stirring again."

"Do what is most congenial to you, for you can afford to choose," answered Leech in a serious tone, and with rather a wistful look. "I have come to say that people are in error who suppose that Miss Marvell is Sir Ham's heiress. Sir Ham's estates are all in his possession, and will devolve on Lady Mayrose."

Mayrose glanced at his cousin; Mary, who had turned away to conceal that her eyes were red, looked round too, and there was a moment's silence. Leech's face assumed a supplicating air, and Mayrose understood that he chose this delicate manner of making restitution both for his—Mayrose's—own sake, and to avoid degrading Grace by an avowal of the shame which prompted her atonement.

"Do you mean that the Penny estates are still my father-in-law's own?" he said, quietly.

"Yes, with a considerable sum in stocks," replied Leech.

"But Miss Marvell—is she quite unprovided for?"

"She will not be unprovided for long, I trust," answered Leech, "I am here in her name now, Mayrose, to ask you for her forgiveness. I have not inquired, and shall never inquire, what has been the nature of her offence towards you; I bring you her message as she sent it, and endorse it with a prayer of my own."

"How can Grace doubt that we have freely forgiven and forgotten everything after all that has happened?" interposed Mary, after a glance into her husband's eyes.

"Mary is right," said Mayrose, pressing his wife's hands. "Tell Miss Marvell, Leech, that I have no reason to feel unkindly to her, for she rendered me a service of which I am only just beginning to be aware. Mary shall go up with you to say this, and as much more as may persuade Miss Marvell that we both wish her well."

"I did not expect less of you," answer Leech, a little unmanned. "And I thank you in my own name, for I hope that Miss Marvell will consent now to become my wife."

CHAPTER XII.

IN EXTREMIS.

So Mayrose was rich again ; for the fortune which Grace restored amounted to almost £25,000 a year, far more than enough to prevent the necessity of selling Springfield, and to leave Mayrose an income of nearly £20,000. It would have been useless to attempt refusing any part of this restitution, for Quilpin Leech would have been hurt, nor would he have suffered a compromise. He had now the right to direct Grace. She agreed—not without hesitation, for his own sake—to reward his constant love ; and just before the Paragonist Ministry resigned, Leech surrendered his appointment at home for an equivalent post in the colonies. After a private marriage, at which Mayrose gave away the bride, they left England together, and there was no cause to dread that Grace would not prove a good wife—for women are what their husbands make them, and men should treat indulgently the errors they commit as girls in remembering how humbly and saintedly they often atone as mothers.

But before Grace and her husband sailed, Mayrose had been restored to health, and friends flocked round him again ; not less numerous, perhaps, from hearing that his pecuniary fortunes had somehow been retrieved. One would be doing an injustice to the tenacity of genuine character as resolute in hatred as it is in love, by pretending that the “Boudoir Cabal” disarmed their enmity. Neither Violet Chevychase nor Lady Coralmere (whose husband's death was now confidently fixed to take place next spring, without further adjournment, as the playbills say), nor any of the Ladies Midge, ever forgave Mayrose. Lady Canonlaugh also continued to rail piously against him, instancing his prosperous circumstances as a proof that his alleged sacrifice had been absurdly over-vaunted. But how should we feel the price of friendship if we were left without enemies ! The hostility of the Caballers was more than compensated to Mayrose by his reconciliation with Lord Hornette, who came on purpose to Penny Hall to shake hands with him. There was such a fibre of manly rectitude in this stiff Earl that Mayrose's heart warmed towards him, so that he wished Zellie and the Earl might both be brought to overlook by-gones and at last be united.

Possibly Lord Hornette heartily wished this too, for he was not a man to recollect with rancour the hurt that Zellie had tried to do him in a moment of aberration ; and possibly we ourselves might have wished to conclude this story with a record of Zellie's betrothal. But Zellie's was a nature that does not forget, one which finds indeed as much happiness as sorrow in remembrance. To all outward seeming she appeared to recover her serenity ; but there was a quiet reflectiveness in her manner which proved that her life was animated more by thoughts within than by concerns without ; and one day she started her placid father by enquiring when she should be of age to make a will.

Lord Rosemary had just given up his Seals then to his successor in the new Paradyse Cabinet, and he was somewhat at a loss as to what he should do with his leisure, so that he found he could devote a few minutes to puzzling out his daughter's meaning.

“Why, bless my soul, Zellie, what can have put such ideas into your head ?” he said.

“I only wanted to know whether I should ever have property of my own,” answered Zellie, with a smile that removed all mournful significance from her words.

“Why, my dear, you will of course have the same portion as your sister when you marry,” rejoined the Earl.

“And if I never marry ?”

“Why shouldn't you marry ? Of course you'll marry. But if you didn't—why—h'm—I would give you the portion as soon as you liked, Zell, and when I die you will have half the estates—about £20,000 a year, missy.”

“I think I should like to have some property of my own, really my own,” said Zellie coaxingly, as she stood behind her father's chair and fondled him. “I should

like to have enough to put into a will, and leave to others when I am a very old woman, papa."

"Lord Rosemary perhaps hardly entered into the spirit of this wish; but it cannot be doubted that Zellie received the assurance that she would be endowed with enough to put into a will, and it need not be speculated as to who was the person she proposed making her heir. We may anticipate so far as to say that when Mary, consoled and refreshed after all her troubles brought a little son into the world, it was her own wish that Zellie should stand godmother to it, and from that day Zellie looked into Mary's eyes and into Mayrose's without quailing—tenderly and simply like a sister. She was one of those women, who morally renovated by a great heart-trial, frequently live to a great age, to become the providence of other households. They attach themselves to charity, and to the kindlier, more graceful forms of well-doing which the world does not call charity; but be their occupations and their age at death what they may, it may be said of them, when they are finally gone that they have led the lives of vestals, eternally cherishing a fire not to be extinguished. Such was Zellie's case.

And now we may return to Sir Ham.

The poor knight lingered on for weeks, clinging to life with that strange tenacity often to be found in those who have nothing to live for. It was evident from the first that he would never more rise from his bed; but Mayrose was quite cured, and Grace had many days since given her promise to Quilpin Leech, when at last it became unmistakeable that the old knight had received his summons.

Mary had been sitting by his bedside all day, when towards evening her father turned towards her, and tried to sit up. He was terribly aged by his malady. His hair, undyed now, had become quite white, and his once round features had thinned out of all recognition. Seeing him trying to rise, Mary stood up, and propped him with pillows; then hearing the ominous rattle in his throat which she had been warned to look upon as the token of approaching death, she hastily rang, and ordered the servants to summon Mayrose.

Mayrose hurried at once, and found Mary supporting her father with her arm, while the dying man stared intently, and seemed to struggle for speech. His mind appeared gradually to clear at last, as it often does in the final stage of paralysis, and suddenly he stammered:

"It's you, Mary, dear. 'Where's Jane?'"

"Mamma is not here now, papa dear," faltered Mary. "Try and lie back and rest. Are you in pain?"

"I'd like to see Jane," murmured the old knight. "Jane was my wife, and it's she who stood by me—when we was—both young, and set up in business." He plucked at his counterpane for a moment mechanically and repeatedly; then, with a voice growing more indistinct: "Who's that man, Mary, and why do he kneel down? I think I remember him, though. Wasn't you married, child, to some one of the quality?"

"Yes, papa," said Mary; "don't you know him again? Its Frederick—my husband."

"Frederick—yes. My head throbs less now than it did afore, child. Ay, I see things now; and it seems to me Jane's gone—isn't she dead, Mary? I recollect a night in Lunnun when they brought her in and laid her on a sofa—I don't think I ever seed her since." * * *

He was speaking faster now, but his incoherence subsided by degrees as though one by one the events of his life were being arrayed before him in a parting and plainly seen vision. After some minutes he recognized Mayrose, and addressed him by name, then made a sign that he wished to feel Mary's hand. A moment's silence ensued after this, and the rattle was the only tuing audible in the stillness of the room, and then without preface, and with a light in his eyes which left no doubt that consciousness had returned, the dying knight faltered:—

"I've made a power of money, my dear; but there's other things beside that to live for. I don't know as I was ever the happier for it. And I think I'm going now. Jane's awaiting for me."

Sir Ham sank back and his lips moved for a minute longer. Mary threw her arms round him and sobbed on his breast.

"Oh, papa, will you pray that we may all meet again in heaven?"

"Yes," murmured the dying knight, with a faint sigh! "and good 'll come of it."

CONCLUSION.

Our tale is ended here; but perhaps the reader who has followed us so far will ask for a moral. We briefly give this one:—

Everyone who has stood at the foot of an eminence and compared the rugged path at his feet with the smooth look of the peak rising almost to the sky, has forgotten maybe that the peak is rugged too for those who stand at the summit. So it is in life. For those in lower stations the lot of those above them seems exempt from cares and enviable. Every class forgets the flints and steepes of that superior to it; till we get to the highest-class station of all, where men having wealth, name and rank as Lord Mayrose had, nevertheless are apt to find the way of their lives hard enough.

But hard only in a manner to them as to others, for we have seen that difficulties are surmounted by the application of a little energy which is at the command of the lowly as well as the high, and which assuredly brings its reward. Nevertheless, it is something to have struggled and prevailed; to have come through temptation unhurt and undiminished. The smallest wind blows down so many saplings that we may afford admiration for the strong oak which has weathered the gale of a night, and lifts its head proudly to the sunlight of a new morning.

THE END.

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